TURUN YLIOPISTO

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Inka Rantakallio

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I study the discourses of new spirituality, atheism, and authenticity in Finnish underground rap in the twenty-first century. The study maps the worldviews and audiovisual aesthetics of four Finnish artists, Ameeba, Khid, Julma Henri, and RPK (the latter two forming the duo Euro Crack), while exploring larger issues such as contemporary Western religious trends and the relationship between artists, their audience, and the music industry.

The study's data consist of field research (ten interviews, observation at concerts and in social media 2013–2017), and sonic and audiovisual material (recordings, three music videos). Theoretically, the study draws from religious studies theories on Western alternative spirituality and atheism, popular musicology, hip hop studies, and theories on musical authenticity. Methodologically, the study relies on ethnographic data collection, discourse analysis, and close reading.

The study indicates that while the four Finnish rappers emphasize the individuality of their worldviews, their views reflect a mixture of ideas and traditions present in contemporary Western religious landscape, including non-dualistic Eastern religions, New Age environmentalism, and scientific atheism. The artists also outline an aesthetic for their music and underground rap more generally as defying rap music, pop music, and music industry norms, as independent music making, and as drawing from alternative electronic genres and deeper philosophical content. The artists construct authenticity by claiming that their music reflects their personal worldviews and aesthetic preferences.

Further, the study increases understanding about the interrelationship of rap and postmodern worldviews and advances research on the connections between popular music and religion.

KEY WORDS: hip hop, rap, new spirituality, atheism, worldviews, authenticity, popular music, hip hop studies, cultural musicology, religious studies, audiovisual studies, lyrics, music videos, interviews, discourse analysis, close reading, Ameeba, Euro Crack, Khid, Julma Henri, RPK.

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirjassani tutkin 2010-luvun suomenkielistä underground-rap-musiikkia ja siinä ilmeneviä autenttisuuden, uushenkisyyden ja ateismin diskursseja. Tutkimuksen kohteena on neljä suomalaista rap-artistia (Ameeba, Khid, Julma Henri, sekä RPK, joka Julma Henrin kanssa muodostaa Euro Crack -duon), ja heidän ilmaisussaan rakentuvat maailmankatsomukset ja audiovisuaalinen estetiikka. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan myös laajempia kysymyksiä liittyen länsimaiseen uskontokehitykseen sekä artistien suhteeseen yleisöön ja musiikkialaan.

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu kenttätutkimuksesta (10 haastattelua, havainnointi konserteissa ja sosiaalisessa mediassa 2013–2017) sekä äänellisestä ja audiovisuaalisesta materiaalista (äänitteet, kolme musiikkivideota). Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys hyödyntää uskontotieteen teorioita koskien länsimaista uushenkisyyttä ja ateismia, populaarimusiikintutkimusta, hiphop-tutkimusta, sekä teorioita autenttisuudesta. Menetelmällisesti tutkimus nojaa etnografisiin aineistonkeruumetodeihin sekä diskurssianalyysiin ja lähilukuun.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että vaikka artistien maailmankatsomukset painottavat yksilöllisyyttä, ne heijastavat myös laajempia nykyhetken länsimaisessa uskontokentässä toisiinsa sekoittuvia ideoita ja traditioita. Näihin kuuluvat erityisesti non-dualistiset itämaiset uskonnot, New Age -vaikutteinen ympäristötietoisuus, sekä tiedeuskoon nojaava ateismi. Artistit myös rakentavat omaa sekä underground rap-musiikkia koskevan estetiikan ihannetta rap- ja pop-musiikin sekä musiikkialan normeja vastustavana, itsenäisenä, sekä elektronisista genreistä ammentavana, ja josta löytyy myös syvällisempää, filosofista sisältöä. Artistit rakentavat autenttisuutta argumentoidessaan musiikkinsa perustuvan heidän henkilökohtaisiin maailmankatsomuksiinsa ja esteettisiin mieltymyksiinsä.

Yleisemmin väitöskirja lisää ymmärrystä rap-musiikin ja postmodernien maailmankatsomusten välisestä suhteesta ja edistää populaarimusiikin ja uskonnon yhteyksien tutkimusta.

ASIASANAT: hiphop, rap, uushenkisyys, ateismi, maailmankatsomukset, autenttisuus, populaarimusiikki, hiphop-tutkimus, kulttuurinen musiikintutkimus, uskontotiede, audiovisuaalinen tutkimus, sanoitukset, musiikkivideot, haastattelut, diskurssianalyysi, lähiluku, Ameeba, Euro Crack, Khid, Julma Henri, RPK.

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to introduce me to Nordic hip hop studies scholarship in 2012. He asked me how the field of Finnish hip hop studies was doing, which led me to ask similar questions in my home country for years to come. These Nordic colleagues have inspired some of the conclusions and observations in my analysis and provided me with the opportunity to travel to Sweden on multiple occasions.

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In Helsinki, October 2019
Inka Rantakallio

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All figures are screenshots of web sites or YouTube videos.

1 Introduction

1.1 Interdisciplinary approaches to rap and worldviews

Flow Festival 2016 in Helsinki. After two slightly rainy festival days, Sunday afternoon seemed ashtonisingly warm and sunny. I had purchased tickets months in advance after receiving information that the Finnish underground rappers RPK and Khid were both booked to perform at the festival. Khid's slot was early Sunday afternoon, around 2pm, yet he had managed to attract a sizeable amount of tired-looking festival goers to the venue called Black Tent (which is exactly what it was: a black tent). Near the end of the performance, he performed the song "Harha" ("Illusion," Khid 2016a) which I wrote about in my field research diary:

> The eleventh song was "Harha" ("Illusion"), which still always strikes me as somehow more personal than his other songs. Khid showed a prominent middle finger while looking up to the sky, rapping the lines "I pressed charges against the universe" ("universumille mä nostin syytteen"). The song ends with a sample from a ghettotech song where the lyrics go "get that loot get that cash get that money," and right before the sample began playing, Khid said: "next up life guidelines it's simple and capitalist" ("seuraavaks elämänohjeita se on yksinkertaista ja kapitalistista"). The song [Harha] seems to characterize a nihilistic, atheistic and disappointed attitude towards life, yet with a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude that suggests that we should not take everything – nor everything Khid utters – too seriously. (Rantakallio f2016.)

RPK's performance at the festival took place around 6.30pm that same day, in a smaller warehouse style venue called Zalando (after the sponsor). I suspected in advance that RPK might invite the other three artists I focus on in this study, Khid, Ameeba, and Julma Henri (aka Julma H), to feature on stage with him, but I was still slightly surprised when it happened as the performance was advertised as his solo set, anticipating the release of his solo album. Khid came to perform the song "Luoti" ("Bullet") which was the single from their collaboration album *Ei* (Khid x RPK 2014). Around the middle of the set, RPK invited the other two artists to join.

> RPK then said it is time to invite more featuring artists to the stage, "I'll invite more guys on stage, meaning Julma H and Ameeba, good friends" ("pyydän lavalle lisää jäbii kyseessä Julma H ja Ameeba, hyvii frendei"), and they performed "Sydääni" ("Heartbeat") together as the eighth song of the set. This was the first time I saw Julma H perform without a ski mask, yet he did have a snap back tucked snug around his head so that the lid covered his eyes – at least from where I was standing – completely. I noticed that Ameeba (still) had his longer hair style, and realized that all three artists had man buns (albeit small ones)! I couldn't help but think that similar styles are connected to their artistic collaborations and friendship and that this was not mere coincidence although they might not realize it themselves. (Rantakallio f2016.)

These extracts from my concert field research diary that I compiled during 2013–2016 (Rantakallio f2016) while researching four Finnish underground artists illustrate several aspects of why these rappers became the object of my PhD research. Firstly, they often performed together (on record and live) at that time, which is the result of not only aesthetic and lyrical similarities but their friendship. Secondly, their songs feature lyrics dealing with so-called new or alternative spirituality and particularly Buddhist, Hindu, and New Age ideas, but also a critical atheistic stance as demonstrated by Khid's performance of "Harha" described above. These aspects together form a complicated network of collaborative and individual artistic efforts which, I argue, offer a window into contemporary Western post-Christian worldviews and their manifestation in popular music and urban popular culture.

The continuing mainstreaming of Eastern inspired spirituality (Hunt 2003; Partridge 2004; Campbell 2007) and atheism (Bullivant & Ruse eds. 2010; Taira 2015) is rather well-known as a current phenomenon in the West, manifesting concretely in the growing presence of yoga centers, widespread practice of mindfulness and meditation, increased availability of self-help-literature (also in Finland, see Ketola & Sohlberg 2008), and the recent public visibility of "celebrity" atheists such as Richard Dawkins. Yet, knowledge and analyses of the manifestation of these worldviews in popular music have been lacking in academic research. The relationship between popular music and religion more generally has to an extent been labeled a "blind spot" in popular music studies (Moberg & Partridge 2017: 7). Also, while authenticity has been widely researched in popular music studies (e.g. Moore 2002; Weisethaunet & Lindberg 2010; Anttonen 2017a) and in hip hop studies (e.g. McLeod 1999; Speers 2014; Westinen 2014), it has rarely been explored in connection with religious worldviews (see however Shannahan & Hussain 2011; Miller 2013). The present study aims to further bridge this gap in existing research on popular music and religion and to expand our

knowledge of underground rap's styles, discourses, and aesthetics in the twenty-first century while continuing to lay ground for the emerging field of hip hop studies in Finland and globally.

Accordingly, this study explores discourses around new spirituality, atheism, and authenticity, and their connections in Finnish underground rap. It aims at offering new points of view on matters discussed in existing studies, such as the relationship between hip hop[1] and authenticity, while introducing new perspectives on recent Western religious trends and worldviews which manifest in popular music. Through a case study that maps worldviews, audiovisual aesthetics and authenticity discourse(s) in the musical expression of four Finnish artists, Ameeba, Khid, Julma Henri, and RPK (the latter two also forming the rap duo Euro Crack), some larger issues such as the relationship between an artist's music, their audience, and the music industry are explored. These issues are analyzed with the help of data that consist of field research material (interviews, participant observation online and offline) and sonic and audiovisual material (recordings, music videos), combined with a theoretical-methodological approach drawing from hip hop studies, popular musicology, religious studies, ethnography, social constructionism, discourse analysis, audiovisual analysis, and close reading (see chapters 2 and 3). Throughout the analysis (chapters 4–6), I argue that popular music and worldviews are interconnected, following religious studies scholar Christopher Partridge (2004: 123) who asserts that "popular culture is both an expression of the cultural milieu from which it emerges and formative of that culture, in that it contributes to the formation of worldviews."

[1] In general, I use the word *hip hop* in this study to refer to hip hop culture, which encompasses e.g. music, rapping, DJing, dance, graffiti and visual arts, writing, theater and movies/series, but also stylistic expression such as fashion and language, and societal engagement and knowledge. I use the term *rap* to refer to music, partially also because rap has become perhaps the most common term (instead of hip hop music or MCing) in Finnish language for denoting the music genre. The kind of differentiation between rap and hip hop outlined here has seemingly become a (tacit) standard both among practioners as well as academic and non-academic writers. However, I occasionally refer to hip hop music by which I denote a larger segment of music and genres that utilize elements from hip hop production, for example contemporary R&B music. This kind of broader categorization combining rap and R&B has equally become a standard in chart listing for example, as rap and R&B artists frequently collaborate.

Over the past decades, an increasing number of scholars representing various disciplines have written about the relationship between religion and popular music.[2] It seems, however, that some scholars still, to an extent, tend to view the two as superficially (or even metaphorically) rather than dynamically connected. This has resulted in some popular music research looking at music *as* religion (Till 2010; cf. Gosa 2011), or for example some theologists looking at hip hop as religion given the spiritual experiences, social structure, and a sense of belonging it can provide (Sylvan 2002). Religious studies scholars Marcus Moberg and Christopher Partridge (2017: 2) note that these types of approaches have received criticism for applying the category of religion too straightforwardly, allowing "virtually any cultural practice to be labelled as 'religious.'" Optionally, the focus has been on the role of music *in* religion. For example, religious studies scholar Gordon Lynch (2006: 482) writes about "the role of popular music as a resource in stimulating the rise of alternative spiritual identities and ideologies," which gives the impression that music is mostly a cultural vehicle for religion, while religion is perceived as a pre-existing independent entity (*sui generis*), a stance criticized for example by religious studies and hip hop studies scholar Monica Miller (2013) and many others promoting a critical approach to religion (e.g. Ramey ed. 2015; McCutcheon 1997; 2003).

I argue that many of these approaches do not sufficiently take into consideration the explicit and multiple manifestations of *religion in popular music,* for example lyrics that construct religious concepts such as *karma* (dogma of causality in Indian religions) or *sin* (transgression against God in many monotheist religions), which appear in many genres of mainstream popular music (e.g. Partridge & Moberg eds. 2017). Likewise, some research simply focuses on lyrics and ignores what music inspired by religious beliefs sounds like, in other words lacks musicological analysis that looks at a piece of music, such as ambient or dub music, as a sonic mediator of culturally constructed ideas about religion. *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music* (2017), edited by Marcus Moberg and Christopher Partridge, discusses these connections between popular music and religion critically through a collection of articles; the authors have largely embraced an approach where the relationship between music and religion is seen as mutually constructive and complex, also taking into account how music may affect or even construct new forms of religiosity (or secularity: see Hopps 2017; cf. also Pinn 2015b: 127–135).

[2] Gordon Lynch (2005: 22–25) categorizes "religion *in* popular culture," the representation or manifestation of religion in popular culture, as one possibility out of what he outlines as three main approaches to studying how religion and popular culture interact. This is also the point of view largely taken in the present study. Another approach according to Lynch is "popular culture *in* religion", in other words how it shapes religion. A third approach investigates how religious groups react to various popular cultural items, such as books, movies, or music.

Also several scholars researching hip hop have arguably managed such multiplicity of perspectives and interdisciplinarity in analyzing religion in hip hop music: hip hop scholars have looked at the variety of connections between religion and hip hop, as hip hop scholars and theologians Monica Miller and Anthony B. Pinn's (2015) edited anthology *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader* demonstrates. Hip hop studies has thus far, however, been limited to studying mainly hip hop music's relationship with Islam (e.g. Alim 2005; Khabeer 2007; Rantakallio 2013) and Christianity (e.g. Nelson 2015 [2005]; Miller et al. eds. 2015d; Gault & Harris eds. 2019), in other words institutionalized religions (Miller 2013: 73). Also, the abovementioned hip hop reader's section on Eastern religions is very limited in its scope: the section features an interview of an Italian-American rapper discussing his interest for Vedic literature and yoga, an overview of Japanese hip hop, and an article of a Taiwanese R&B singer. Elsewhere, the themes of New Age and new spirituality have been mentioned merely in passing (e.g. Miller 2013; 2015 [2011]; Pinn 2007). Also atheism's connection with hip hop has thus far been largely overlooked (see, however, Bey 2016). Pinn has, however, written rather extensively on nontheistic humanism's connection to hip hop (e.g. 2015b; 2003), expanding understanding about how secular worldviews manifest in rap.

The present study on four Finnish underground rappers is a continuation to the abovementioned works (and many others cited in this study) on hip hop and religion. This study is also an attempt to not only expand the scope of hip hop studies – in Finland and globally – to include contemporary cultural manifestations of so-called new spirituality and atheism, but also to integrate theoretical and methodological perspectives from both religious studies and popular musicology in a way that takes into consideration the multimodal aspects of rap music as mediating and constructing worldviews. The overall approach in this study is thus deeply interdisciplinary. Apart from Christianity, religion has thus far been a somewhat neglected area of research within popular music studies, particularly when considering to which extent popular music has been researched from the point of view of gender and sexuality (e.g. Whiteley 2000; Pääkkölä 2016; Hawkins ed. 2017; Kehrer 2017; cf. also McClary 2002 [1991]), for example.

Indeed, this study introduces new themes into the study of hip hop and religion: new spirituality drawing from non-dualism and (explicit) atheism. Three of the rap artists under focus, Ameeba, Julma Henri, and RPK, employ vocabulary and ideas in their music that are connected to new spirituality and other religious worldviews which focus on non-dualism, such as (neo-)Hinduism, (neo-)Buddhism, and New Age. This vocabulary includes concepts such as "oneness," "consciousness," and meditation, which manifest also in my interviews with Ameeba and Julma Henri. Khid on the other hand has referenced atheism in his music and in my interviews (Khid i2015; i2016). Many societal, cultural, and political themes in the music of

these artists also appear to be related to such worldviews, as new spirituality commonly (yet not always) includes criticism towards current human lifestyles and capitalist profit-seeking that are seen to contribute to the ignorance and exploitation of nature, of other humans, and of oneself (cf. Lynch 2007). The artists can be placed into the category of "conscious" rappers, a term largely used in previous research on rap (e.g. Krims 2000; Ogbar 2007) as well as in popular discourse about rap and regularly applied to (especially underground) rappers whose music and lyrics contain social and political commentary, often religious themes, and a purpose of disseminating knowledge.[3] Christian rap is often considered as a form of "conscious" rap along with Muslim rap. Furthermore, according to Monica Miller (2013), featuring religious ideas in rap can give authenticating force to the artist's music, which is a pertinent point given the focus of this study.

In order to address these themes, while my research is grounded in popular musicology, hip hop studies, and popular culture studies, it intersects with religious studies theories on Western[4] new spirituality and atheistic worldviews, post-Christianity, and post-secularism, which will be defined and discussed in further chapters. This study relies to a large extent on the notion of fluidity and socio-culturally constructed nature of religion and identities in postmodern societies (Taira 2006; Bennett & Taylor 2012; cf. Bauman 2004). In the Western context, this postmodern condition is often labeled as post-Christian era where Christianity's status as the mainstream religion dominating social structures and thinking has eroded (Hunt 2003: 6–8), and individual syncretistic "pick-and-mix" or "supermarket" religiosity (Hunt 2003: 6; see also Wuthnow 1998: 10) as well as atheism and being religiously unaffiliated and cultural diversity more generally is increasingly common. This theoretical and socio-cultural point of view is applied in this study for analyzing the discourses of new spirituality and atheism in the context of contemporary Finnish underground rap.

[3] With the term "conscious," I also refer to lyrics that are "cleaner" (although cursing is not completely absent). However, while this study focuses on similar "conscious" themes, the music of the aforementioned artists is not limited to such content. Julma Henri under his alias Julma H, RPK under the alias Koksukoo, and Khid especially under his other alias DJ Kridlokk have made music with lighter, humorous topics such as getting drunk or playing video games, and occasionally also beats that are closer to pop aesthetics, e.g. catchy samples or sing-a-long refrains.

[4] I employ the terms "West" and "western" here in the sense religious studies scholars have done (Lynch 2007; Versluis 2014) when they describe the development and influence of new spirituality as drawing mostly from the 1960s countercultural developments that spread from the US mainly to Europe and Australia. Note that my usage of these terms in this sense applies only to this particular religious development, not music or other entities discussed in this study.

In addition to situating itself into the interdisciplinary field of hip hop studies and addressing questions dealt with recently in sociology of religion, my research is also thoroughly located in the fields of cultural musicology and popular music studies as I study current rap music as socio-cultural practice, and popular music[5] more generally as an important site for constructing and communicating worldviews, values, identities, and ideas about human life via sonic, visual, literary, and other performative/multimodal means (see e.g. Frith 1996; Bennett et al. eds. 2006; Shuker 2008; Scott ed. 2009). One of the first scholars to study hip hop academically, Tricia Rose, asserts (1994) that rap challenges traditional notions of what constitutes music, naming the sounds and music in rap as cultural markers crucial to the song's meaning; this has also been one of the starting points for the present study. Additionally, as field research (particularly interviews) has been my main source of data, my study also touches upon ethnomusicology (see e.g. Titon 2008: 25) as a research field and approach, emphasizing the importance of engaging with musical actors and artists through interviews and observation.

The discourse on authenticity is also one of the main focuses in this work. My research draws from and critically discusses previous research on authenticity in the fields of popular music studies (e.g. Moore 2002; Barker & Taylor 2007; Anttonen 2017a; Weisethaunet & Lindberg 2011) and particularly hip hop studies (e.g. McLeod 1999; Rose 2008; Jeffries 2011; Ochmann 2013; Speers 2014; Westinen 2014). Authenticity has been no less ubiquitous in discussions of hip hop than in other popular music genres, and remains relevant. Communication studies scholar Kembrew McLeod (1999: 135) names it as the identity of hip hop culture, central to the formation of artistic identities and practices. Authenticity has also proven to be a salient and pervasive discourse in the Finnish hip hop scene and something which artists have felt the need to invent original and personal responses to (cf. Westinen 2014). In light of this, I hypothesized in the early stages of my research that there is a connection between the four Finnish underground rappers' conscious material (such as expressions of religious worldviews) and a common demand for "realness"

[5] Sarah Thornton (1995: 164) notes that "popular" in popular culture connotes taste which is "'approved,' 'preferred' and 'well-liked.'" For more on the definition and meaning of "popular" in popular culture and/or music, see for example Frith (1996); Lynch (2005); Richardson (2012: 5, fn.3). When speaking of popular music studies, I am mainly referring to research that analyzes the function and meaning of widely practiced and/or widely spread cultural expressions, such as rap music. Additionally, when speaking of popular music, I am not suggesting a separation of art music vs. other music, for instance. Yet, it is possible to observe my use of the term as relating to sociologist Stuart Hall's (see Lynch 2005: 11) idea of popular culture as opposing the elite culture, as I am studying underground rap that features some amount of countercultural ideas (such as critique of capitalism). I discuss my use of the term "underground" in section 1.3.3.

within hip hop culture, which to some extent was proven correct (see analysis chapters 4, 5, and 6).

The primary research material used in this study for analyzing spiritual and atheist worldviews and authenticity are nine semi-structured, thematic interviews with the four rap artists. Additionally, three music videos, which are analyzed through close reading, form another central albeit very different type of data. The secondary, supportive data informing this work consist of field work observations at concerts and in social media (2013–2017), and one interview with VJ Sellekhanks who has created live visuals, music videos, and promotional footage for the study's artists. The research material also includes the artists' records with a focus on releases from 2010s. By mixing these types of data, I am also mixing what religious studies scholar Gordon Lynch (2005: 112–113) defines as the three "main" types of approaches to studying popular culture: an author-based, a text-based, and an ethnographic/audience-reception-based approach. The author-based approach focuses on the artist persona and how it is reflected in the research material (in this study, particularly interviews and music videos); the text-based approach focuses on how various "texts" construct meanings (in this study, particularly music videos, records, and lyrics); and the ethnographic/audience-reception-based approach focuses on material generated through ethnography which is sometimes combined with reception studies (in this study, field work). This study applies particularly the first two approaches, with a critical eye on the variations in the artists' interviews and musical expression of worldviews and authenticity. Chapter 5, however, is more text-based, as it focuses on how the specific music videos convey different meanings and discourses more or less independent of their creators' intentions (see Moberg & Partridge 2017: 4).

Methods of analysis draw from discourse analysis and audiovisual close reading (Richardson 2012; 2016a; 2016b). Through combining discourse analysis and audiovisual close reading, this study goes beyond "traditional" material used in discourse analysis, written and spoken texts, as I analyze also audiovisual elements (music videos) as socially and culturally produced "texts" (see Heinonen 2005; cf. Foucault 1972: 28, 100). In other words, while I utilize discourse analysis in analyzing the written research material (interviews, lyrics), I combine discourse analysis with audiovisual close reading when analyzing music videos and music. Arguably, mixing these different approaches also aids in overcoming some of the shortcomings of previous studies outlined above that have focused on the relationship of worldviews and popular music from a narrower angle. As a hip hop scholar currently working in the field of popular musicology with a background in religious studies, it has seemed natural for me to embrace interdisciplinarity and theoretical-methodological diversity in my work.

Like all studies, this one is also inevitably selective in its scope and viewpoint on the topic. Firstly, my focus on four underground artists and the themes of spirituality, atheism, and authenticity that come across in the chosen artists' music and interviews does not reflect the full variety of themes in their productions, nor the full variety of Finnish underground rap music.

Secondly, I chose to do a case study on rap and religion, with a focus on new spirituality and atheism for a variety of reasons, although the four selected artists, Ameeba, Julma Henri, RPK, and Khid are not the only ones in the Finnish rap scene who feature religious ideas and worldviews in their music. A case study can be defined as a research approach which aims at illuminating an issue or phenomenon from a certain angle and which can, through this kind of in-depth focus, produce results increasing understanding about larger societal and cultural developments and their connections (cf. Anttonen 2017a: 47). In my study, in addition to the discourse of authenticity which is prevalent in hip hop and popular music but perhaps particularly in underground rap, I have been interested in highlighting the connections between rap artists' worldviews and particularly contemporary new spiritual and atheistic ideas (instead of more established, institutional religions). Excluding Khid and/or the theme of atheism from this study and simply focusing on the new spirituality discourses would have been an option, but as my work progressed the overall aim became to demonstrate not only one but several of the aspects of post-Christian individualistic and syncretistic religiosity *and* secularity visible currently in Western societies, using rap music as an example of popular music's connections with worldviews. I wanted to highlight that atheism is not an anomaly among today's worldviews nor is new spirituality the new norm. These transformations are closely related to one another, and to the processes of globalization and digitalization which have rendered available multiple new sources of information on spiritual as well as secular beliefs. Hence, I decided to narrow my study to four artists which I estimated would yield enough interesting information to answer my research questions (see subchapter 1.2 below) about worldviews and underground rap aesthetics.

The rhetoric around spirituality in the music of these four artists outlined above has been largely overlooked in Finland by the general audience and journalists, which seemingly verifies cultural anthropologist John L. Jackson's (2015: 89) observation about hip hop music and artists with complicated lyrics and flows as difficult or impossible to decipher even to the most fervent fans. It also makes this study all the more relevant in order to accomplish a fuller understanding of the Finnish rap scene and its underground artists. Given the thematic similarities with for example Finnish rap artists Olpekkalev and J Riskit, whose music also reflects ideas about (new) spirituality, and the collaboration of Ameeba, Julma Henri, and RPK with openly Muslim rapper Pijall, this study also arguably provides general

knowledge about rap's current underground expressions and about the relationship between Finnish rap and religion (see also Rantakallio 2019). Albeit being narrowed down to a few artists, with a focus on underground rap and religion this study offers a substantial amount of new themes and content to the emerging Finnish hip hop studies field. A case study approach focusing on collaborating artists began to appear advantageous as I progressed with the interviews; all my informants, accidentally or not, shared insights about one another that I would not have gotten had I chosen completely separate cases.

Today, there is no question about rap music's global influence and established status in the world's various popular music scenes. Any claims made in the past about rap music as a "fad" now appear nonsensical. This study is timely as Finnish hip hop music has become one of the most successful popular music genres in Finland since roughly 2008, inciting the interest of larger audiences towards rap[6]; even Finnish politicians have commented publicly on their personal tastes in rap (see Rantakallio 2018a: 381, fn. 3). While several Finnish rappers such as Cheek, JVG, Elastinen, and Mikael Gabriel have reached mainstream recognition in Finland, new artists continue to emerge in the rap underground. Also more and more female rappers such as Adikia, rappers representing the indigenous Sámi minority such as Áilu Valle, child rappers such as Hugo, disabled rappers such as Signmark, openly LGBTQIA+ rappers such as Mercedes Bentso, and rappers with diverse backgrounds such as Finnish-Jamaican rapper Diison are part of the currently thriving scene. The mainstreaming of the genre has also manifested in new forms: Cheek, JVG, Paleface, and Paperi T have all released books, the former two in biography format (Aaltonen 2017; Friman 2016), Paleface two books on Finnish rappers (Paleface 2011; Paleface & Salminen 2019) and a collection of pamphlets (Paleface 2017), and Paperi T an acclaimed poetry collection (Paperi T 2016). Many rappers have appeared in various prime time TV shows, and for example Paleface, Gracias, and Julma Henri have also tried a career in acting. In many ways, thinking of the Finnish rap genre as somehow separate from the larger Finnish popular culture scene today would be misguided. Indeed, Finnish rap can offer a whole variety of interesting examples for popular cultural research.

[6] The impact of the widely popular Finnish TV-show *Vain Elämää* ("Just Life") based on a Dutch format, which has aired on national Nelonen TV channel since 2012, should not be underestimated. Each season, the show features seven popular artists of various ages who represent rap/reggae, schlager, rock and pop. In the show, the artists perform versions of each other's songs and share thoughts about their music, often in a confessional and emotional manner. Rap artists who have participated in the show include for example Cheek, Elastinen, Mikael Gabriel, Pyhimys, and Ville Galle (from the rap duo JVG). Elastinen has also been a judge in The Voice of Finland for three seasons (2012–2014), a reality television singing competition based on a Dutch format.

Through the analytical tools briefly outlined above, I aim to demonstrate that the content and meaning of contemporary underground rap music is much more complex than literal interpretations or a simple lyric-oriented approach to music implies. A mixed data and mixed methods approach such as the one chosen for this study can significantly increase our understanding on the operation of discourses in and through music. The research questions and aims below were formulated with this in mind.

1.2 Research questions and aims

The main research question in this study is: What kinds of discourses on new spirituality, atheism, and authenticity are constructed in the Finnish rap underground, and how are these discourses interconnected?

Additionally, five sub-questions contextualize the study: (1) What are the principal features of the spiritual/atheistic worldviews that the four Finnish underground rap artists construct (in interviews, lyrics, audiovisually)? (2) How do the artists connect these spiritual/atheistic worldviews with the question of authenticity? (3) How do the artists construct and define "underground" as an artistic identity and aesthetic and connect it with their aesthetic preferences and artist personas? (4) How do the artists construct the discourse on authenticity in relation to hip hop culture, the Finnish music industry, and their audience? (5) Through what specific means (lyrical, sonic, visual) are the discourses on new spirituality, atheism, and authenticity constructed and connected in the audiovisual expression of the artists?

The first (1) sub-question analyzes which aspects of a vast variety of forms of new spirituality/atheism the artists mainly draw from and construct through their music and artistry. This question is dealt with particularly in analysis chapters 4 and 5 with the help of the whole research material (interviews with the artists, lyrics, records, music videos, field research at concerts and in social media). My interest lies more in tracing the connections of the artists' expression to the larger Western religious developments instead of how representative the artists' worldviews perhaps are in the Finnish context; thus, the literature used in this study consists of both international and Finnish studies. My focus regarding worldviews is particularly on Ameeba, Julma Henri, and Khid, whereas RPK's role is considered more as a producer and as the other half of rap duo Euro Crack. It should also be noted that while I analyze the artists' worldviews with a focus on new spirituality and atheism, my intention has not been to discover what the exact religious beliefs that the artists subscribe to in their personal life are. Rather, my research interest lies in analyzing what spiritual/atheist ideas, symbols, or views the artists *discursively* draw from and construct as part of their artistry, in other words how new spirituality and atheism

function as cultural resources. I am first and foremost interested in the artist persona (see Auslander 2004) and how the artists discursively attach spiritual or atheistic ideas and authenticity into that persona, their artistic performance, and expression. Hence, how the spiritual/atheistic ideas and worldviews intersect with the artist's private identities is more implicit than explicit in this study, as my interview questions have also been posed from the point of view of the artists' music and worldviews it portrays.

The second (2) sub-question investigates how the artists discursively construct the themes of spirituality/atheism in their music as a sign of authenticity which is based on their personal experiences and worldviews, in other words how these spiritual/atheistic ideas in music become intertwined with the artists' narratives about personal beliefs, experiences, and values. This question is discussed particularly in chapter 4 with the help of interview material.

The third (3) sub-question focuses on the motives and influences behind the artists' music, more specifically how the artists discuss their aesthetic preferences, how they construct their own form of underground rap as alternative music, and how these ideas become connected with their artist persona and the themes of new spirituality, atheism, and authenticity in their music. While the focus is on interview data, answering this question also entails a certain amount of analysis of the lyrical content and the sonic and visual features of their music. The question is discussed particularly in analysis chapter 4, but also in chapters 5 and 6.

The fourth (4) sub-question explores the artists' views on music making vis-à-vis their audience and the larger music industry, focusing particularly on how the artists construct authenticity as underground rappers. This question is discussed mainly in chapter 6 but also intermittently in other chapters, the analysis relying on artist interviews, lyric and audiovisual examples, and to some extent my field research in concerts and in social media. The plural form "discourses" in this subquestion refers to the multiple discourses and themes that become attached to the larger discourse around authenticity, such as ageing and underground music making practices, but also to how the artists discern between normative and ideological authenticity and what they perceive to be its opposite, "real" authenticity.

The fifth (5) sub-question aims to shed light on the artists' musical and audiovisual expression and the specific sonic and visual way(s) through which their expression constructs cultural meanings and various discourses in connection to authenticity and spiritual/atheistic wordviews. The audiovisual markers of authenticity, spirituality, and atheism are analyzed via close reading of three music videos in chapter 5. I address how rap sounds are related to the discourses of authenticity and spiritual/atheistic ideas while grounding music as cultural discourse (Rose 1994: 71).

Due to the limited length of a doctoral dissertation, I have not included many examples of lyrics, only some that I have found most pertinent and useful for illustrating how the discourses of authenticity, new spirituality, and atheism are constructed and connected in the artists' music. When a theme related to new spirituality, atheism, or authenticity came up in the interviews that seemed closely related to the artist's music, I have provided a relevant example. Also the music analysis in this study has been mainly descriptive and points to the dimensions and details in the sonic substance which support the cultural interpretations of rap as communicating worldviews; I have focused (in addition to lyrics) particularly on timbre, beat, layering, and the audiovisual representation of the songs (see appendices: cue sheets for three analyzed music videos) instead of systematically outlining their formal and structural features (such as chords, melodic or rhythmic patterns). This reflects my orientation towards the mixed data and mixed method approach in the cultural and discursive study of popular music. To the most thorough (and hopefully critical) readers, I recommend listening to the artists' various releases when possible for sonic references.

When I began formulating my research questions and ideas, I based them on my listenings of Euro Crack and Ameeba, whom I had noticed to employ several non-dualistic references in their music. Non-dualism here refers to an idea of "oneness" of the universe (and subsequent shared consciousness) which is central in much of new spirituality and New Age drawing from Eastern religions such as Advaita Vedanta (a strand of Hinduism) as well as Buddhism (see Campbell 2007; Versluis 2014). In the beginning of 2010s, I had become interested in this type of thinking after reading related sources that have gained popularity in the West over the past decades. I was also growing more aware of the persistent salience of the discourse around authenticity in Finnish rap music (Westinen 2014) as the genre was becoming more mainstream than ever before; a handful of artists had achieved large sales numbers already at the beginning of the new millennium, but only in the 2010s several rappers became broadly recognized also among non-rap-listening audiences and were now seen as peers to the most popular pop and rock artists in Finland. This pre-understanding of the field and the research questions above have guided me in analyzing the discourses of spirituality, atheism, and authenticity, although my data would have yielded many more avenues. However, I have attempted to show what kinds of themes and sub-discourses these larger discourses connect with.

This research has five central aims:

1. To produce new knowledge about contemporary hip hop culture's content and aesthetics and Finnish rap music as localized hip hop expression through focusing on how discursive and audiovisual representations of

authenticity and spiritual and atheistic worldviews are constructed in the expression of four Finnish underground rappers.

2. To introduce new themes related to worldviews, new spirituality, and atheism into the growing field of international hip hop studies, advancing in particular the study of hip hop and religion.
3. To shed new light on how representations of authenticity, which recur in hip hop and popular music, function in Finnish underground rap discursively and audiovisually, and how they are connected to worldviews. Additionally, to create a new binary theoretical model for analyzing authenticity discourse in hip hop which aids in integrating the results of this study with previous research.
4. To argue that new forms of spirituality and atheism are both part of the historical development of post-Christianity in Western societies, and to demonstrate that they also manifest in the context of hip hop, specifically Finnish underground rap.
5. To develop the fields of popular musicology together with religious studies and hip hop studies through the analysis of the dynamic interconnections of rap music and worldviews, thus expanding interdisciplinary understanding of contemporary rap music.

Summarizing these aims, this study is a pioneering effort to analyze and contextualize twenty-first century Finnish rap music's worldviews, audiovisual (underground) aesthetics, and artist personas with the help of theories about popular music, hip hop culture, and religion. While borrowing theoretical frameworks from cultural musicology, hip hop studies, and religious studies, particularly theories about musical authenticity and post-Christian worldviews, this study also critically develops and contributes to those theories. Finally, this study is timely; while the mainstreaming of rap music and of Eastern inspired religious practices as well as atheistic and secular tendencies are widely recognized as salient features of global popular culture, they all remain understudied. Thus, this work contributes to general understanding about these cultural practices and beliefs and illuminates how music may reflect and contribute to people's ideas about religion and atheism.

1.3 Central concepts

1.3.1 Discourse

Discourses are seen in this study as wide, interrelated, socially and culturally constructed meaning systems that are connected to power relations and build our

social reality and our perceptions of it (Foucault 1972; Fairclough 2000; 2003). "Discourse" in a narrower (linguistic) sense also refers to a unit of written or spoken language (e.g. Fairclough 2000: 3). Like linguist Norman Fairclough (2000), I maintain that discourses are social constructions yet they do not dictate individuals' behavior. This dialectic view of discourses allows me to analyze and interpret social and cultural ideas in the research material but also how individuals assume agency in (re)constructing discourses in the actual practice of creating (oral/written/visual) "texts" (Fairclough 2000: 45, 57, 61). Further, "common discursive formations surrounding popular music actively affect its practices" (Strachan 2007: 245), hence investigating these practices offers insight into the social and cultural formation of music and people's relationship with music.

I often write "discourses" in plural to highlight their complexity, interconnectedness, and mutually constructive dynamic, and how the content and topics of various discourses affect one another and how discourses are constantly changing. Fairclough (2000: 64) lists social identities, social relations, and beliefs together with knowledge as the three forms of social realities that discourse practices construct. Discourses thus affect and build social identities and relationships between people, but also function at an ideological and political level (Fairclough 2000: 64–65). Similarly, the discourses around authenticity, spirituality, and atheism are constructed in my research material in relation to artistic identities, the music industry, and through audiovisual means as well as through discussions about aesthetics and genre(s).

1.3.2 Authenticity

Authenticity, which is often defined as the perceived "sincerity" of music, is commonly agreed to be a social construct and has been dealt with extensively in popular music studies concerning different genres such as rock, pop, and folk (see Thornton 1995; McLeod 1999; Moore 2002; Hess 2005a; Barker & Taylor 2007; Anttonen 2017a). Authenticity as a discourse is seen in this study as socially, linguistically, and audiovisually constructed and culturally valued, and as affecting artistic expression and identity while it interacts with the societal, in this case Finnish, context and with other discourses. This study also emphasizes that authenticity, due to its perceived socially constructed and ascribed nature, is not just one thing despite its recurrence across genres and localities. The discourse on authenticity is incredibly complex as discourses are constantly negotiated with the changing social surroundings. The criteria for being authentic are constantly fluctuating, which we then perceive as various, yet interconnected, linguistic, visual, and sonic expressions. In this work, I have adopted the view that authenticity is not only an abstract social construct, but can also be performed (see Pennycook 2007:

58, 69) in various visual, sonic and other material ways, and can be incorporated into a "performance persona" (Auslander 2004). This seems like a suitable theoretical viewpoint when considering that "[p]erformance also shifts the focus from internal, abstracted competencies to public, bodily enactments" (Pennycook 2007: 61). Via such an approach, we avoid the pitfall of trying to determine someone's inner sentiments about the (in)authenticity of their persona or congruence between private and public identities. Although identity or identity construction is not a central theoretical concept in this study, it is important to point out that all social discourses, such as the one around authenticity, are inextricably bound with identities, both individual and social, and in the case of music or other art, the perceived *auteur* or agency behind the song.

Authenticity is often considered to be an integral part of the whole hip hop culture, as demonstrated by the emblematic phrase "keeping it real." It also influences the hip hop music market and consumers. Historian and hip hop scholar Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2007: 6) calls authenticity "an obsession" in hip hop. Perhaps the most salient feature of hip hop authenticity is the emphasis placed on "realness," the seeming truthfulness of the artist, a notion which in hip hop has historically had many class- and race-based connotations (Rose 1994; Ogbar 2007). Cultural sociologist Laura Speers (2014: 212–213) notes in her study on hip hop authenticity that the most common words used directly in relation to authenticity are "true" and "real." As hip hop scholar and cultural critic Tricia Rose (2008: 136) states, "hip hop remains a genre largely valued for its seemingly autobiographical nature […] Keeping it real has become a genre convention […]." In this study, this aspect of personal-experiental authenticity, especially staying true to yourself in music making and portraying your worldviews truthfully, along with the hip hop authenticity's cultural-historical and ideological functions became the most salient.

1.3.3 Underground

This study focuses on underground rap instead of more mainstream expressions. It is clearly problematic to define what underground means, particularly in today's music industry with streaming services seemingly offering all the music in the world to consumers, and this issue is acknowledged in this study as well. Although I do not wish to deliberately perpetuate any dichotomies, such as mainstream versus underground, this particular and very pervasive discursive idea of the oppositionality of certain styles of (hip hop) music is, however, relevant for my study and to some extent supported by my interview and lyrics data, particularly regarding the discourse on musical aesthetics. More precisely, my theoretical understanding of the term "underground" relies on popular music scholar Sarah Thornton's (1995: 117) definition: "More than fashionable or trendy, 'underground' sounds and styles are

'authentic' and pitted against the mass-produced and mass-consumed." Underground is thus a discourse closely connected with authenticity, subcultures and exclusivity, alternative music, and resistance and criticism towards mainstream popular culture (Thornton 1995), which hip hop became a part of when it attained commercial success (McLeod 1999).

In research, "underground" and "subculture" are sometimes used interchangeably (Thornton 1995: 117). More than Thornton (1995), however, I wish to focus on underground as a conceptual framework for discussing "sounds and styles" rather than subcultural communities. Whereas "subculture" as a term has several class, age, gender, as well as race based connotations (e.g. Thornton 1995), "underground" as a theoretical concept might be considered more adaptable to speak to the sonic and other aesthetic elements of the genre in question. That being said, underground aesthetics often also construct societal and political commentary as well as social identities. For example, the artists in this study exhibit critical attitudes towards capitalism and sexism in lyrics but the critique is constructed also through sonic and visual means. Disregarding these aesthetic aspects in favor of interviews or lyrics would result in a different type of analysis of how the artists construct underground artistic identities.

"Underground" is thus understood as a notion deeply connected with alternative musical aesthetics in this study. When speaking of aesthetics, a term which originates in the Greek word *aisthēsis* and translates to "sensation," I denote artistic style and ideology of expression. I discuss aesthetics through a framed and contextualized analysis of the qualities of the rap music of the four artists[7], and look at how the artists themselves describe their music in relation to spirituality, atheism, and authenticity.[8] Musicologist Joanna Demers (2010: 138) defines aesthetics as "shared

[7] A further short note on terminology is perhaps necessary: I call the four rappers in this study artists instead of musicians. By this, I have attempted to encompass two aspects of their musicianship in particular. Firstly, they do not play "traditional" instruments (e.g. guitar, flute, drums, or other instruments that can be played acoustically) during their live performances although they do use for instance laptops and drum machines to create sound and to my knowledge occasionally also play instruments such as keyboards on their albums. Secondly, they create music (lyrics and/or beats) instead of simply performing music written and composed by others (as session musicians or pop singers often do). In this way, the terminology is meant to underscore their auteurship and their approach to producing music and sound which is somewhat specific to the genre they (arguably) represent, alternative rap drawing from electronic music.

[8] It must be stated that overall, I am less interested in what the music actually sounds like than how the artists attach certain meanings to it and what their aims, ideals, and principals in music making are. Yet, analysis of aesthetics also requires interpretation (Demers 2010: 5) which is part of my interdisciplinary analysis of the four rappers' music, drawing from the fields of hip hop studies, popular musicology, and religious studies.

values concerning what is good, entertaining, and compelling art," but underscores that besides appreciation, aesthetics are also linked to social identities (Demers 2010: 140). In this study, these social identities are linked to underground rap but also to the forms of electronic music which the four rap artists draw influences from. "Underground" or "alternative" aesthetics, then, refer to a style of (rap) music which exhibits ideas about resisting perceived mainstream values and norms through musical (lyrical, sonic) and/or visual content and through the performers' artistic identity and persona. One manifestation of such aesthetics in underground rap can be spiritual or atheistic lyrical content, or beats drawing from alternative electronic music subgenres, as seen in the case of the four rappers in this study. The specificities of how the four rappers discursively construct their underground aesthetics are analyzed throughout chapters 4–6.

Underground music (and music in general) often generates a community around it. When referring to the communal aspect of underground cultures, instead of subculture,[9] I usually utilize the term "scene" to describe the Finnish hip hop community and culture; the term has become more popular among cultural studies and youth studies in the twenty-first century (see Williams 2006; Smith 2010; Salasuo & Poikolainen 2012: 16). Music scenes more generally can be defined as contexts where producers, artists, and consumers together express their tastes in music and build a collective sense of separateness from others (Peterson & Bennett 2004: 1–3). More importantly, the Finnish loanword *skene* originating from English *scene* has become somewhat standardized in popular usage when referring to the Finnish hip hop culture, whereas subculture is less frequently used anymore after Finnish rap became a chart-topping genre since the 2000s. Also, the four artists in this study do not associate only with the Finnish rap scene, but also with various electronic music scenes through their DJing and production practices, or, in the case of Julma Henri, to some extent with anarchist and leftist ideological groups. Regarding the oppositionality of the artists' lyrical content, while the content of mainstream pop music is rarely in conflict with mainstream society's values, the rap artists in this study in many ways recognize their own standing as advocates of alternative ways of thinking, whether in terms of lifestyle, or political or spiritual ideas.

[9] "Subculture" as a term and object of study can be traced (at least) all the way from the Chicago school's urban fieldwork (e.g. Gelder 2005b; Warren and Karner 2010: 128) through Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural (CCCS, e.g. Gelder 2005a) to "post-subculture" (Gelder 2005a), and finally to its contemporary status as a close synonym to "counterculture" or "scene."

The artists in this study are not well-known outside their own genre and have not achieved significant records sales, such as number one chart positions.[10] More importantly, they have also labelled themselves (see chapters 4–6) and have been labelled in various print and digital media as underground rappers (e.g. Tamminen 2012; Mattila et al. 2014), which also ties their music to hip hop's authenticity discourses (see McLeod 1999; see Westinen 2014: 238; cf. also Thornton 1995). Although we need to be critical towards media discourses, Thornton (1995: 119) among many others notes that media plays a crucial role in the formation of subcultural insider/outsider roles, and contributes centrally to the overall discourse. This also became clear during my interviews. I wish to underline that although I use the term underground somewhat like a category in my study, I consider underground to be a discourse, which the artists, music industry, media, and the audience construct together. Additionally, for example literary scholar Lennart Nyberg's (2008) study on Swedish rap demonstrates that underground can also have various localized meanings. The notion of underground thus appears far from fixed, being complex and constantly changing.

Speers (2014: 120) helps to define underground (rap) music and especially its current status as the Internet has arguably rendered nearly all music available: "it is more helpful to think of it [underground] as on the fringes of the mainstream, rather than diametrically opposed as they often crossover and feed into one another." Of course, this idea of the fluid boundary between mainstream and underground is not new (see e.g. Keightley 2001). In addition – and related – to Speers's view, I have developed another way to differentiate between Finnish mainstream and underground rappers; when persons who are not rap fans but are familiar with the most successful rap artists in Finland have asked me which artists I have included in this work, these persons typically did not recognize any of the case study's artists or at best suspected having heard of one of them. The people in question then concluded that the artists must indeed be underground. As Finnish rap as a genre is very much

[10] I understand "significant" as records sales which together with related activities such as concerts and merchandise generate sufficient income to make full-time musicianship clearly profitable. In the case of DJ Kridlokk and Julma Henri, the notion of underground is problematic, as they have indeed generated viable incomes via these various aliases, including DJ Kridlokk's number 2 position in 2014 on the official Finnish album chart with his album *Mutsi* ("Mom"). Khid is well-known as Kridlokk among those who listen to Finnish rap, and he has also acknowledged being fully employed by his music (Khid i2015). The rationale for including them in this study is more connected to musical aesthetics and a certain level of artistic independence than sales numbers or media recognition, as both are – to borrow Laura Speers's (2014: 120) term – "on the fringes" of mainstream and underground. Yet, I also noticed during my research that the Khid moniker was unfamiliar to most people, even to those who recognized the artist name DJ Kridlokk.

mainstream today, it can be assumed that even those Finns who do not listen to it are familiar with the names of mainstream artists (particularly Cheek, Elastinen, JVG) due to their media exposure and chart presence. In essence, albeit being a clear oversimplification on its own, my criterion for using the term underground became connected to the idea that someone unfamiliar with the Finnish rap music scene does not typically know the artists in this study whereas active rap listeners usually do. The four artists in question thus do not represent current mainstream rap in Finland in terms of audience recognition (or sales). I should add that, like Thornton (1995) in her work, my understanding and conceptualization of underground relies also on my field work at concerts during 2013–2016 (Rantakallio f2016). During this time, the four artists in this study only headlined small-size venues with audience size ranging from a handful to a few hundred, or smaller "alternative" festivals offering only rap and/or electronic music, have early performing slots and smaller stages at festivals. This also indicates that their music is not marketed to and does not reach the masses.

1.3.4 Spirituality and atheism

The two major themes in this study pertaining to worldviews are new spirituality and atheism. Religious studies scholars Frank Pasquale and Barry Kosmin (2013: 463) state that "[i]f there is a grand trajectory, it would seem to be […] toward increasing diversity spread across the religious-secular spectrum." This illustrates the nature of current religiosity in Western countries where "neat categories and clear-cut divisions" (Bauman 1998: 57) are largely absent. Wood (2007: 162–163) notes that people can identify as religious, yet be "without *specific* religious identity" (emphasis in original).

In connection to this changing understanding of religion, I speak frequently of worldviews instead of spiritual worldviews or religion as this allows for a more comprehensive framework when analyzing atheistic (ontological, epistemological, ethical) ideas (cf. also Pentikäinen 1994: 11) and how the artists view the music industry, the environment, and structures in which they operate as rappers. In contrast to Lynch (2007: 41), I understand worldviews as not something necessarily shared by a group – particularly given the framework of individuality, syncretism (mixing of religious traditions), and fluidity of current Western religiosity outlined below – but, following anthropologist Clifford Geertz, as an individual's "most comprehensive ideas of order," and as an "image of actual state of affairs" (1973: 127). This definition creates a relation to both personal values, choices, lifestyle, and cultural and societal structures (cf. also Pentikäinen 1994: 7). Being able to choose one's beliefs and lifestyle is part and parcel of individualization of religiosity (see e.g. Heelas 1998: 5). Further, I frequently speak of spirituality rather than religion;

spirituality is commonly used to indicate individual experience whereas religion is more frequently associated with institutionalized forms of religiosity, tradition, authorities, and communal identity (Bender 2012: 48; Sillfors 2017: 99–103; cf. Giordan 2007: 171). More importantly, a similar differentiation was exhibited in the interview answers of for example Khid and Julma Henri as they used the Finnish term *henkisyys* (spirituality in English). Generally speaking, spirituality and religion are not, however, mutually exclusive but can co-exist in various interlapping forms (Sillfors 2017: 100–103), yet spirituality as a term denoting individuality is more reflective of the focus of this particular study. Another major reason why I am using the term spiritual(ity) more often than "religion" or "religious" is because this has become the preferred term not only of many religious studies scholars but more importantly of the people whose religiosity is often under scrutiny.

Ameeba and rap duo Euro Crack (Julma Henri and RPK) include a unique mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age ideas into their music, particularly ideas about one non-dual universal consciousness and ego-free mind, which they combine with contemporary rap sounds. Such content can be seen to pertain to so-called new spirituality which is a significant trend in Western religiosity, growing out of 1960s counterculture and the Eastern religious ideas it absorbed, where "self-spirituality," the individual striving towards "authentic" spiritual development, is at the center of spiritual life (Hanegraaff 1996; Rambachan 2006; Lynch 2007; Ketola & Sohlberg 2008; Versluis 2014). New Age has previously been used as an umbrella term for a variety of holistic practices focusing on the spirituality of mind and body, but particularly from 1990s onwards New Age has been subsumed and to some extent replaced by the term(s) new or alternative spirituality (Hulkkonen 2017:2 fn. 3). In this work, New Age is used to describe some aspects of the heterogenous variants (cf. Taira 2006: 66–67) of contemporary non-institutionalized spirituality that manifest in the rappers' expression.

This descriptor "new" or "alternative" in front of spirituality is typically used to underline how this form of spirituality or religiosity takes place mainly outside of institutionalized religion. The central structural change in Western religiosity in recent decades has been that, unlike in institutionalized religion, authority now comes mostly from personal experience (Woodhead & Heelas 2000: 343; see Lynch 2007: 10), as it is seen to provide "immediate and uncontamined access to truth" (Partridge 2004: 75). This individualism or authority of personal experience does not, however, typically entail a denial of the existence of something "bigger" than oneself; rather, new spirituality is often inclined towards pantheism drawing particularly from the Hindu *brahman-atman* concept that everything is part of the same higher entity (Partridge 2004: 73). Like several scholars across different fields, I, too, consider the topics related to spirituality/atheism that emerge in my data as part of a continuum of increasing individualization, syncretism, and diversity of

worldviews in the West from the Enlightenment onwards (Marshall 2001: 17; Pasquale & Kosmin 2013: 463). This could also be seen as a move away from "grand narratives" to "micronarratives" in religion, science, humanity, art, or other areas of life (Heelas 1998: 7–8; cf. Hunt 2002: 39, 54).

An important parallel to the rise of new or alternative spirituality has been the increased visibility of atheism in the West, and such a worldview also manifests in the expression of the rapper Khid. As theologist Gavin Hyman (2010: 1) notes, atheism is one form of unbelief or nonbelief that developed alongside agnosticism and skepticism when Christianity's influence in the West began to crumble. Atheism began to grow stronger particularly from the nineteenth century onwards (Hyman 2010: 82), and by the 1960s became a socially more widely accepted worldview (Hyman 2010: 16–17). The last decade or two have seen it become a more well-known stance, touted by such public atheists as Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens. More importantly for the present study, however, atheism "defines itself in terms of that which it takes to be denying" (Hyman 2010: xviii). Reflected particularly in Khid's discourse, this denial and turning away from spirituality is not only a discourse on atheism, it is equally a discourse *about spirituality,* which it renounces. Atheism does not exist, as Hyman (2010: xviii) notes, without the object (religion, spirituality, supernatural) it positions itself against. Atheism as a musical inspiration and lyrical topic is, of course, not new.[11]

Religious studies scholar Teemu Taira (2006) speaks of liquid religion, borrowing from sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, to describe, on the one hand, the fairly recent (structural) transformation of religions, and on the other hand, the general disability to define religion or (new) spirituality due to these structural and discursive changes. The individuality that appears to characterize the current religious landscape in the West also poses challenges to researchers as people may assert that their own religious views and practices are uniquely theirs, thus rendering it difficult to evaluate how much these reflect social patterns at large (Bender 2012: 53). Based on the above, we may however estimate that new spirituality and atheism in their various forms are equally part of the body of Western worldviews today and part of the same historical development: that of Christianity's decline, and the space(s) it vacated especially in terms of practice and in terms of its influence on social and political institutions (Hunt 2003: 7–9). This development has accelerated since the 1960s and has brought about the individual freedom when it comes to (non)religiousity. Traditional forms of collectivist religiousness are increasingly seen as ill-suited to the values and lifestyles of individualist, liberal, postmodern

[11] In the Finnish context, one well-known example is Nightwish's *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* (2015) album liner notes that feature the celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins as the first name on the credits list.

Western people, yet spirituality as well as mental and physical well-being are seen more and more as deeply connected and worthy of investment.

Indeed, it might be more useful to look at religions and different forms of nonbelief such as atheism as *cultural resources* as outlined by Taira (2006: 55; cf. also Wuthnow 1998: 8; cf. Wood 2007: 37) rather than as fixed entities between which one chooses. The artists in my study draw from several sources and build worldviews which are nonspecific to particular religious or atheistic strand of thought, hence characteristic of abovementioned "liquid religion" (Taira 2006) or the flexible contemporary forms of atheism (Taira 2012; 2015). However, according to their own words and my scholarly interpretation, the artists are clearly influenced by the kind of thinking and philosophies discussed above and further in section 3.2.2 through the framework of post-Christianity, which makes it interesting to study the combination of these rather recent cultural phenomena, hip hop and new spirituality/atheism. I have chosen to discuss this topic from a rather wide perspective so as to avoid direct labelling and in order to allow the discourse around spirituality to be seen and developed based on the artist's own words and expressions. Taira (2006: 25) remarks that liquidity applies to the analytical tools of scholars as well – there is no longer need to speak of religion with exact terms; identifying it as "close enough" to the category of religion is sufficient.

1.4 Positioning the study: on being "native"

There are (at least) three main reasons why this study requires me to reflect on my position as a "native" researcher: my socio-cultural background as a Finn, my role as a practitioner in the Finnish hip hop scene, and my familiarity with the study's topic as a consumer of hip hop, and to a lesser extent, of new spiritual literature. While I do not consider myself as being a "full" insider in the hip hop or alternative spirituality scene, my personal interest in these topics demands that I place additional and critical attention to my possible presuppositions and biases as a scholar researching hip hop and new spirituality (cf. Moberg & Partridge 2017: 6). I, like any other researcher, am strongly influenced by my personal history but also social surroundings, and this is reflected in my choice of research topic and theoretical and methodological orientation.

Firstly, I was born and raised in Finland and live in the same geographical area as my informants, and thus my study can be seen to represent "anthropology at home" (cf. Järviluoma 2010). I share nationality (Finnish), skin color (white) and linguistic (Finnish) background with the rappers in this study in addition to residing in the capital city, Helsinki. Although class was never discussed directly, I have deducted from our conversations that we all come from working class or middle class backgrounds. While my gender differs from the male artists, we are close to the same

age (mid-thirties to early fourties). I also know that all four have been in heterosexual relationships, and I myself am currently in one as well.

Secondly, during this research project I became part of the Finnish hip hop scene more as a practitioner, first as a radio host on Rap Scholar show on Bassoradio, and from 2018 onwards as a DJ. Bassoradio is a Finnish urban radio station focused on hip hop, bass music, and dance music, and has at least in the past been considered as the "go-to station" for Finnish rap listeners as there are few radio shows explicitly focused on rap music on other stations – most of Bassoradio's music shows were terminated in September 2019, however. Rap Scholar was a show created by DJ Double M (Mikko Mäkelä) and aired on Bassoradio from November 2015 until September 2019. I joined as a co-host in December 2016. The "semi-academic" show focused on hip hop music and related societal and cultural topics from a hip hop studies point of view. While the term originated as a joke by the creator Mäkelä, the research conducted for each episode is closely resemblant of academic work, which in the show is combined with cultural criticism, journalistic contemporaneity, and carefully selected musical examples (Rap Scholar nd.). My new affiliation as a radio journalist entailed getting acquainted more with what goes on "behind the scenes" in the Finnish hip hop culture. Two of the rappers in this study, Ameeba and RPK, subsequently also became my radio colleagues as they both had their own shows on Bassoradio, Ghetto Tyylit ("Ghetto styles") and Alas and Alas Ambient, respectively. Due to my new proximity to hip hop practitioners – which also took shape during seminars and various events where I met people face-to-face – I got acquainted with more insiders and began also hearing and understanding things more profoundly than an average "outsider" consumer or researcher.

In the beginning of my research in 2013, however, I was not fully immersed in the scene. As cultural studies scholar Tuomas Järvenpää (2017: 64) mentions, in ethnomusicology, an insider is typically also a musician or learns the musical craft under study; as I did not become a rapper, I cannot claim insider knowledge in that sense. Yet, as a radio host I also began learning about DJing, and radio DJs and hip hop journalists have crucially influenced and interacted with hip hop culture from its pre-history (Keyes 2002: 30–32; Chang 2005: 409–417, 424–425). Since early 2018, I have performed at various venues under the alias DJ SHY GRL, playing mainly hip hop and R&B, as well as taking on the role of a tour DJ for the Finnish feminist rap duo SOFA.

Thirdly, my personal history with and cultural knowledge of hip hop and new spirituality have afforded me with certain perspectives in this study. As hip hop researchers, many of us need to reflect on our own relationship with hip hop, which is often passionate. As someone born in the mid-1980s, I am what media and hip hop studies scholar Murray Forman (2015) terms a "hip hop native"; I do not remember a time when hip hop would not have been a central component of popular music

culture, and I have heard hip hop music in my surroundings ever since I started listening to popular music (at age 6). I remember experiencing my first live hip hop music performance as a teenager in 2003 and since then I have seen countless Finnish rap artists perform together or solo, as well as several US and non-US rappers from Nas to Kendrick Lamar. I have been more active in listening and going to hip hop concerts since 2010.

My research and personal consumption-based knowledge of hip hop combined with a practitioner knowledge has arguably given me a kind of "double-insider" position. Interestingly, since the beginning of my research project, I have been asked dozens of times when discussing my research topic if I myself am a rapper. I find this peculiar given that women are notoriously few in the rap scene. However, this question seems to reveal that people perhaps assume that popular music scholars or hip hop scholars write about "what they know," which in my case of course *now* seems true – I am a hip hop journalist, DJ, rap fan, and have been interested in contemporary spirituality also on a personal level. Becoming a hip hop scholar is perhaps a rare choice; the field is still quite young (the earliest written works are from the 1980s, such as David Toop's *Rap Attack* [1984]), and certainly not a well-known or established one. As hip hop researchers, we constantly need to defend our choice of topic to outsiders, particularly to those unfamiliar with hip hop who may hold negative stereotypes about the genre. As sociologist Bruce L. Berg (2009: 201), notes, "research is seldom undertaken for a neutral reason," which in my case means that I was, as a rap listener, interested in raising the academic hip hop research in Finland to "the next level" by conducting research on a severely under-researched area, and thus building a stronger connection with the international academic community of hip hop researchers with whom I have interacted since 2012.

My interest in new spirituality coincides somewhat with my interest in this study's artists and their musical productions. My initial hope was that my familiarity with the religious aspects would make it easier for the artists to share their thoughts with me. My background in study of religions is an equally strong disciplinary influence in this study along with popular musicology, and my admiration towards the art of the rappers and acquaintance/friendship with them has led to an empathetic approach towards them rather than thoroughly critical – albeit my aim has been to produce critical cultural analysis. I do not see the harm in taking advantage of these different types of knowledge and access, provided that the research is carried out with careful self-reflection which then allows others to observe my position as a researcher and the set-up in which I conducted my research. In other words, it is crucial to write "*what the researcher knows and how the researcher came to know it*" (Berg 2009: 198, emphasis in original).

As to my personal worldviews or their spiritual content, it seems rather logical that a researcher writes about a subject that is of strong interest to them and may

even have personal importance. However, as this is not an autoethnographic study of spirituality or atheism, I leave my personal worldviews aside here, as they did not acquire much relevance during my interactions with the artists during my research. Had we had longer discussions about my personal views, I would have included reflections and analysis on such exchanges in this study. Yet, as Järvenpää (2017: 68) argues, in the "dominantly secular" Finnish society discussing spiritual views often entails taking a minority stance, and thus posing questions about them as a researcher is not necessarily easy even for another "native" Finn such as myself.

When writing, I have come across both disciplinary as well as my own scholarly identity questions which pertain to one issue in particular: position in (between) the field(s). I identify as a hip hop scholar, musicologist, but also as a religious studies scholar. Some examples of musicologists writing within hip hop studies are Adam Krims (2000) and Justin Williams (2014). Also several religious studies scholars have studied hip hop (see Miller & Pinn ed. 2015). On a related note, religious studies scholar Richard King (1999) states openly and religious studies and hip hop studies scholar Monica Miller (2013) implicitly that the study of religions should consider itself as a part of cultural studies rather than an "offshoot of theology" (King 1999: 2), which seems like a suitable approach also in the present study which considers rap and worldviews as part of popular culture. All in all, hip hop studies scholars seem to define themselves first and foremost as either representatives of their respective disciplines, as "heads" in support of the culture, or as independent scholars in the growing interdisciplinary field. Whether a source of confusion or of fruitful, critical dialogue, these discussions demonstrate that the complexity of cultural phenomena such as hip hop demands our attention from multiple angles.

Scholars researching non-US hip hop cultures also seem to have a need to position themselves vis-à-vis the US scholarship (e.g. Mitchell ed. 2001a; Pennycook 2007), as I have noticed over the years during conversations I have had with international hip hop studies colleagues. This involves at least two types of issues; on the one hand, establishing the worth of "local" hip hop expressions via rigorous scholarly research, and on the other, debating whether US hip hop is always necessarily relevant to scenes outside US geographical territories. Both questions pertain to discussions around cultural origins, identity, and appropriation, as hip hop culture first developed in the US.

The present study focuses on what could be termed localized hip hop expression; although the issue is not explicitly present in the research questions, this study's focus is on Finnish artists and Finnish rap music, thus implicitly addressing the means and discursive elements through which the artists localize their expression. The term "local," however, can be a problematic one, as US artists who may or may not have reached global commercial success also claim local allegiances and influences, yet seem to be less often labelled as "local" (or "glocal") than their non-

US colleagues. Although the cultural currents of global hip hop are without a doubt stronger from the US towards other parts of the world than the other way around – which at least partially explains the logic of the issue mentioned above – the sometimes belittling connotation of "local" denies the significance of these artists for large non-US audiences (consider Finnish rap artist Cheek selling out stadiums in Finland). To some listeners of Finnish rap, US artists are not necessarily relevant at all. I am also tempted to suggest that the term "local," when used in the limited sense outlined above, to some extent denies the worth of scholarly research on hip hop that does not hail from the US, hence the scholarly vigor in establishing hip hop studies identities such as "Nordic hip hop studies" or "European hip hop studies" (see Krogh & Pedersen eds. 2008a; Nitzsche & Grünzweig eds. 2013). More importantly, based on my discussions with Finnish rap artists –and assumably this applies to many artists all over the world – they do not necessarily conceive of themselves as being first and foremost "local" hip hop artists, but instead, "just" artists/musicians/rappers/hiphoppers etc. This also relates to Pennycook's (2007) point about the occasional irrelevance of US hip hop to these artists and their craft; these "local" artists are doing their thing regardless. This is not to deny that an abundant amount of borrowing, appropriation, or imitation of US hip hop occurs in Finnish and in other non-US scenes, as exhibited also by the artists in this study.

1.5 Outline

Chapters 2 and 3 delineate the theoretical and methodological approaches used in this study as well as some of the particularities of the context of Finnish rap and hip hop. Subchapter 2.1 introduces the artists, their career trajectories, and musical styles briefly; I have aimed at characterizing their current musical endeavors rather than past ones as the focus in this study is on the 2010s. After a reflexive subchapter 2.2 on my field research (interviewing and participant observation in concerts and social media), I describe the methods of analysis, discourse analysis and close reading, in subchapter 2.3. Chapter 2 also contains ethical considerations interspersed between descriptions of research methods.

Chapter 3 begins with a cultural-historical and stylistic overview of hip hop in the US and in Finland (sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2), and continues with a longer discussion of the discourse of authenticity in rap music in particular (section 3.2.1). This conceptual mapping is followed by my argumentation as to what can be considered to constitute the current fluid religious landscape in Western countries, including a critical synthesis of relevant scholarly literature regarding new spirituality, atheism, and post-Christianity (section 3.2.2). These subchapters outlining the socio-cultural context and theoretical discussion are then followed by analysis chapters.

The analysis chapters 4, 5, and 6 follow a largely thematic format, discussing the most central research question of this study, the interconnected discourses of authenticity, spirituality, and atheism. Chapter 4 focuses on artist interviews, lyrics, and musical aesthetics, analyzing the connections between the discourse around alternative spiritual and atheist worldviews and the artists' "alternative" musical aesthetics. However, the discussion also connects strongly with authenticity and the performance of artist personas.

Chapter 5 brings into perspective the audiovisual expression of the artists through a close reading of three music videos which were released between 2013 and 2014, a period during which all four artists collaborated actively. The focus in this chapter is on how the discourses of authenticity, spirituality, and atheism are constructed audiovisually. Cue sheets of the three music videos (including full lyrics) can be found as appendices. This seeming disorientation from interview data before returning the focus to it in chapter 6 is a conscious choice; I wish to introduce the reader to the artists' narratives about their worldviews and discourses around rap aesthetics in chapter 4 before analyzing these aesthetics further in chapter 5.

Chapter 6 focuses on the discourses around authenticity and underground and how the artists connect these notions with their artistry, audience, and the music industry within which they operate. In a sense, chapter 6 is the artists' commentary of their artist position and the production environment of their art, the content of which has been analyzed in chapters 4 and 5.

Finally, chapter 7 summarizes the outcomes of this research and expands the discussion to rap masculinities and future research possibilities.

2 Artists, research materials, and methods

The present chapter introduces the four rap artists and delineates the research materials that were used in this study, how they were collected, and how and with which methods the materials were analyzed. The first subchapter 2.1 characterizes the artists briefly. The second subchapter 2.2 describes the research materials and the field research carried out, containing also ethical reflections. The third subchapter 2.3 explicates the methodological approaches used in analysis, namely discourse analysis and close reading.

2.1 Artists

Below I outline the four artists' trajectories in a concise manner. Because the focus of this study is on the 2000s and 2010s in particular, also the characterizations are more representative of the artists' recent musical endeavors. Apart from Julma Henri, the other three have also practiced DJing and make and/or play electronic music in some form. As was discussed in the introduction of this study (section 1.3.3), the artists are underground in the sense that their music is not consumed by the large masses; thus I have not revealed their given names here for ethical reasons. All four currently reside in Helsinki, Finland.

2.1.1 Ameeba

Ameeba is a rapper and a producer originally from the town of Vammala, in Southern Finland. He has released three solo albums independently (not on label) under the moniker Ameeba, *Montako puuta on metsä* ("How many trees make a forest," 2012a) followed by *Kummituseläin* ("Tapier," 2015c) and *Apocalypto* (2016a). All three albums have been written and produced over a longer period of time. His discography includes projects and collaborations also for example as Sageone, amebathemoodman, and as part of the groups Forbidden Forest and Syvä Vesi ("Deep Water"). Ameeba has also produced several albums and released instrumental releases as ameba in addition to featuring in the songs by such artists as

Euro Crack, Pijall, SMC Hoodrats, Olpekkalev, and J Riskit. Although Ameeba has been making music actively since the turn of the millennium, he experienced a few years hiatus in the late noughties.

Lyricwise, Ameeba often raps in the first person singular, centering on his artist persona, which affords his music an aura of intimacy and personal experience. A certain confessionality is often visible also in the Facebook updates of his artist page; they often discuss the struggles of music making but also occasionally his personal life (Rantakallio f2016). Mostly focused on connecting everyday philosophies and reflections on nature, the spiritual themes in his music seem the closest out of the four artists in this study to nature religion or native people's religious ideas. For example, one of the recurring themes in his lyrics is the forest, either returning there or dwelling there, providing it a clear spiritual value. He also shares many advice and guidelines while addressing the listener, purportedly drawing from his own past mistakes and learning experiences. In interviews, he has described himself more as a writer than a talker, mentioning that he writes nearly everyday (Ameeba i2015a; i2015b). According to his own words, this sometimes results in avoiding social contact and sharing his music – which I argue reinforces his image as a hermit poet.

Although soundwise Ameeba is hard to categorize, he tends to apply ambient dub and dub techno sounds in his productions. Ameeba is, however, no stranger to more hard-hitting beats, and grime influences as featured in the song "Kaupunki auki kaupunki kii" ("City open city closed," Ameeba 2014a), or a more upbeat, energetic approach such as in "TNT" (Ameeba 2016b). Ameeba's flow is versatile, but often includes a recognizable "chopper" rapping style/technique, a machine-gun-like ultrafast style of rhyming. It is a style few can master, and one which musicologist Adam Krims (2000) would likely characterize as "speech-effusive." Ameeba's adoption of such a style might seems logical to those who are aware of his connection to the versatile Los Angeles Project Blowed underground MC scene (see also Morgan 2009) and their adoption of this style of rhyming. Ameeba has also released a compilation album *In the Pulse of Yesterday* (Ameeba 2015b) featuring several Project Blowed and chopper style artists.

2.1.2 Khid

Khid is half-Finnish, half-Greek rapper from Helsinki. He was born in Greece and immigrated to Finland in the late 1980s. Like most artists in this study, Khid has listened to rap since the early 1990s. Khid started making music in the late 1990s, having according to his own words now made music "seriously" for roughly 15 years (Khid i2015). He is currently a full-time artist and has released music through Monsp Records and Katakombi Records. He is most known for making parodic "gangsta" rap under his other rap alias DJ Kridlokk; as Kridlokk, he is a member of the Finnish

underground rap group KC/MD Mafia and also frequently collaborates with the Finnish gangster parody sensation Eevil Stöö.[12] These artists often use tropes from gangsta rap, but employ exaggeration and humor to underscore that their music is not intended as an imitation of "real" gangsta rap.

While Khid has garnered sizeable attention for his music through the DJ Kridlokk moniker, affording him the opportunity to become a full-time musician, he has, however, used the Khid alias for a more serious, philosophical approach to music, as well as for his DJ performances. He has released several albums during these various projects, including two full-length ones as Khid: *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014) and *Ohi* ("Past" or alternately "Over," Khid 2016a)[13]. According to his own words, he uses the Kridlokk character to perform a gangster parody, whereas with Khid he does "everything else" (Khid i2015). Although I am not looking at DJ Kridlokk in this study, there are similarities and intertextualities present in both characters which demand recognition. More importantly, Khid himself sees them as two sides of the same artist persona, hence it would be negligent of me to ignore his other artist persona completely. Particularly his latest album as DJ Kridlokk, *Silius* (2019), is soundwise and contentwise close to Khid's *Ohi* album.

Khid describes his musical productions as ranging from "ambient to techno" (Khid i2015). Perhaps the most prominent subgenres of electronic music and hip hop that he himself as well as the media has attached him to are grime and Memphis rap. Memphis rap has been used to describe the specific hip hop aesthetics of Memphis area in the Southern United States. These references to Memphis when it comes to his Kridlokk character are not limited to darker sounds, but also include lyrical references for example to gangsta walk, a dance move originating from aforementioned geographical area in the US (see Dimitriadis 2015: 144; Westhoff 2011: 88). Memphis rap is generally mentioned as the single largest inspiration for KC/MD Mafia's and Eevil Stöö's music as well.

Khid's lyrics could be read as a narration of the experiences of Generation Y or millennials in a precarious world in the midst of material excesses and indecisiveness, and of the resulting shared feelings of confusion, boredom, and emptiness. Rap has always had a significant role in depicting social realities (Rose 1994; Keyes 2002; Forman 2002), which Khid continues to contribute to from an urban, middle class 30-something male perspective. The character in his songs gets his kicks mainly from playing video games whereas everything else either annoys

[12] Eevil Stöö has reached several number one chart positions and streaming numbers that are closer to more mainstream rappers despite his darker musical style and somewhat obscure song topics.

[13] I have translated the album's name as "past" as Khid explained that the album contains reflections about how things pass him by while he observes them (Khid i2016).

him or doesn't make him feel anything. Contemplations around death and leaving this world, including travelling to space, surface in his lyrics as a way to help end the nagging feeling of meaninglessness and the general disinterest towards life, yet the persona is unsure of what he wants. At the same time, Khid criticizes people's self-centeredness, pseudo-spirituality, and their strive towards proving their own extraordinariness. Via such narratives, Khid exemplifies a kind of detached "not-giving-an-f" coolness which is likely one reason for his popularity, as hip hop is largely about performing coolness (Jeffries 2011: 114). This is also visible in his flow, which varies a lot rhythmically yet consistently displays a kind of detachedness which is also typical of the Memphis rap subgenre.

What made Khid a particularly interesting artist to examine as a case study, however, was his "conversion" into atheism during my research project, which becomes evident after a comparative listening of his first full-length album *Ei* (Khid x RPK 2014a) as Khid, and second Khid solo album *Ohi* (Khid 2016a). During my first interview with him (Khid i2015), he professed having an atheistic worldview, the translation of which into these two albums he discussed with me during my second interview (Khid i2016). Khid has been a member of both orthodox and later protestant (Lutheran) church, resigning his membership[14] at the age of 18 (Khid p2018).

2.1.3 Julma Henri

The ski mask wearing artist Julma Henri, or alternatively Julma H, is a rapper hailing from the city of Oulu in Northern Finland. He records for his own Mörssi Records label. He formerly performed as MC Money as well as a member of rap group Forever. As Julma Henri, he is mostly known – or even notorious – for his poignant lyrics about substance abuse, mental health issues, and uneven distribution of wealth in society. He is probably the most well-known out of the four artists in this study; when discussing my research with outsiders, his artist name resonated more often than those of the others.

Julma Henri's first albums as the lead figure of Julma Henri & Syrjäytyneet were *Al-Qaida Finland* (2007) and *SRJTNT vol 1.* ("Destitute vol. 1," 2008) which dealt largely with the abovementioned issues in an aggressive tone. The third album made with the same group was *Psykoterapia* ("Psychotherapy," 2010), which introduced the listeners to the content of his social services studies, seasoned with progressive rock and jazz influences. In between these records, the *Outo Nauha* ("Weird tape," 2008) album, a collaboration with Laineen Kasperi, was released. Its lyrics already

[14] This is a detail Khid himself requested to be highlighted. In Finland, members can resign their church membership using local register office's (online) services.

hinted at the forthcoming, spiritual themes of his future records inspired by Eastern philosophies. His politically charged album *Radio Jihad…SRJTNT vol 2*. ("Radio Jihad…Destitute vol. 2," 2011) was released around the same time as his first collaboration with RPK, the introspective *"Henri"* (Julma Henri & RPK 2011). Julma Henri released another self-titled solo album *Julma H* (with a white cover) as Julma H in 2015 which the artist himself described as more "relaxed" and mainstream-friendly than his previous music (Julma Henri i2015; RPK i2015). Its counterpart, *Musta albumi* ("Black album"), came out in 2016. In 2018, the joint album *Kuollu kulma* ("Blind Spot") by Julma Henri and another mask wearing rapper, Sairas T, was released. According to the artist himself, Julma Henri is perhaps closer to his personal self whereas Julma H is more detached (Julma Henri i2017). Julma Henri has separate Facebook pages for his Julma Henri and Julma H aliases, which further indicates the distinct character of these personas.

In 2009, Julma Henri contacted RPK asking him to produce his next album which, containing only RPK's beats and Henri's lyrics, became the somewhat autobiographical album *"Henri"* (Julma Henri & RPK 2011). Julma Henri explained that he envisioned doing the album with someone who would produce "quality stuff" and grime influenced music, assuming RPK could make the kind of beats he was after at that time (Euro Crack i2015).

This initial cooperation then resulted in the formation of Euro Crack once the two artists had began touring together, and the duo released their first EP, *E.U.R.O.C.R.A.C.K.,* in 2012. The following year saw the release of their debut album *Huume* ("Drug," Euro Crack 2013a). Julma Henri and RPK have worked on a follow-up album, and have performed new songs at their live performances, but have not confirmed a release date.

RPK and Julma Henri described their idea of Euro Crack in my interview as "banger rap shit" which is in-your-face, outrageous, trendy, and focuses more on the sounds than the lyrics; but according to the two rappers, the lyrics also turned out quite spiritual and "deep" due to their general tendency to make music with more abstract and philosophical content (Euro Crack i2015). Also aesthetics such as live visuals and related merchandise such as hoodies and beanies play a large role in the overall concept; "if you want to make dope music, it has to look dope" ("jos haluu tehä douppii musaa nii et se näyttää myös doupilta"; RPK, Euro Crack i2015).

Flow-wise, Julma Henri displays his native Oulu dialect but often utilizes various intonations which stress his lyrical message. His delivery is often somewhat aggressive, with much stress put on each syllable. This seems congruent with his artist name ("julma" means cruel), althought this is not perhaps a fully conscious choice of rhyming despite the often politically and socially critical lyrics.

2.1.4 RPK

RPK, also known as RRKK, Roope Koo, Koksukoo, rrimöyk, and Rumpukone ("drum machine"; RPK is an abbreviation of this word) in addition to other aliases, is an independent producer and rap artist who became acquainted with hip hop culture in its various forms in the late 1980s in his hometown Helsinki. RPK is a recognized rap artist and producer/beatmaker in the Finnish rap scene whose pioneering work in the Finnish rap underground since the early 1990s until today can be considered seminal to generations of Finnish underground rappers and rap fans. The most well-known of his rap projects is without a doubt Ceebrolistics but he has also been part of such groups and projects as Serkkupojat (Srkkpjt), Murmurrecordings, Pöly, Siniset Punaset Miehet, and KC/MD Mafia. Perhaps worth noting is that he and the other members of Ceebrolistics started out as Christian rappers.

The frequent experimentalism in RPK's music has been considered Finnish rap avant-garde (Tolonen 2011; Lähde 2002; cf. Kervinen 1999) since the release of Ceebrolistics's *O.* EP in 2001 if not earlier. This is at least partially due to his versatile use of samples and effects, including glitch, ambient, and natural recorded sounds which can be considered somewhat atypical to Finnish rap and rap music in general. This becomes all the more clear when familiarizing oneself with his instrumental projects and radio shows (Alas and Alas Ambient) which feature noise, dub, new age, and various other mainly electronic music genres. For his instrumental projects, he tends to use other aliases, such as Mörkö, Rrimöyk, RRKK, Rumpukone, and some projects have also had specific names, for example Dim Den. Also his lyrics are often philosophical, rarely straightforward, and rhythmically and poetically complex.

I argue that RPK may be placed in the category of experimental hip hop producers due to the aesthetic and production style and quality of his music, which are reminiscent of those utilized by Flying Lotus for example (see d'Errico 2015). Musicologist Michael d'Errico (2015: 281) defines the central traits of "experimental hip hop" as emphasis on the instrumental music and beats instead of rapping, and deliberately highlighting of production techniques. Besides usually producing beats first when working with other rappers or making his own music, RPK also includes off-beat accents and other aspects of rhythmic experimentalism, allowing the instrumental beats to "stand on their own." He also occasionally releases the instrumental versions of his rap songs. Also fitting d'Errico's (2015: 281) definition, RPK has made it clear that he enjoys experimenting with electronic genres in his music and does not wish to limit himself with genre labels. RPK, like producer and rap artist Madlib for example, also produces a lot of beats which he either never uses, or may use but releases them as separate instrumental albums; for example, Euro Crack's *Huume* (Euro Crack 2013a) album was for sale for a limited period as an

instrumental cassette tape, and is also streamable on BandCamp (Rumpukone 2013). Importantly, "instrumental hip-hop producers have utilized emerging digital hardware devices as extensions of turntable technique and aesthetic practices developed in the early days of the culture." (D'Errico 2011: 60.) Similarly, for live performance purposes RPK does not rely on turntables, but often uses the Akai MPD (like for example Flying Lotus, see d'Errico 2011: 63).

2.2 Field research

In this subchapter, I discuss the process of my data collection and some of its theoretical implications. The term "field research" here denotes both interviewing and participant observation, the interviews forming my primary data and observation my secondary data. The latter informed my interview questions and overall understanding of the artists' public image and fan base. As opposed to aiming at a larger understanding of the Finnish hip hop scene or underground hip hop, I limited my focus to a case study of four Finnish underground artists who have collaborated with each other on multiple occasions. My conscious decision to narrow down my research as well as field work to a case study of four artists can be considered as "a self-critical methodological choice through which one is able to attain analytical depth" (Järvenpää 2017: 25).

Ethnography as a research method has been used across social sciences and cultural studies, also in music research and ethnomusicology (e.g. Thornton 1995; Järviluoma et al. 2003; Barz & Cooley eds. 2008; Ramstedt 2017; Ahlsved 2017; cf. Bennett 2017) for a significant period of time, and more recently also in hip hop studies (e.g. Rose 1994; Schloss 2014 [2004]; Morgan 2009; Speers 2014). Ethnomusicologists Timothy Cooley and Gregory Barz (2008: 4) define ethnography as "observation of and the description (or representation) of cultural practices" whereas field work is the "observational and experiential portion" of ethnography. My research is not ethnographic in a strict anthropological sense where ethnography equals "the description and interpretation of a way of life (or 'culture')" (Cohen 1993: 123), but rather makes use of ethnographic methods such as field research. Popular music scholar Sara Cohen (1993: 132–133) further states that ethnography becomes "meaningless in the absence of theory, but theoretical models are not simply imposed on field situations and data; rather, they provide an orientation to the research which can be developed by the researcher over the course of analysing data." In this study, the theory part (subchapter 3.2) revolves around notions of authenticity in popular music, and contemporary (new) spirituality and atheism. Discourses around these topics are what my methods of data collection aimed to uncover and interpret. I use the term "uncover" hesitantly as I do not see discourses as something that we can "discover" but rather as co-constructed,

constantly changing social meaning systems which do not take place in a vacuum. When the researcher is present during the data collection, as is the case in ethnography, the researcher becomes part of that discursive event and continues to construct these discourses when writing their analysis. As Bruce L. Berg (2009: 198) notes, "[t]he reflexive ethnographer does not merely *report findings as facts* but actively constructs interpretations of experiences in the field and then questions how these interpretations actually rose" (emphasis in original).

Below, I first outline the set up for my field work (2.2.1), after which I offer reflections on the interviews (2.2.2) and participant observation (2.2.3). All three sections draw from my field work diaries (Rantakallio f2016; f2017) and the notes written after each face-to-face interview with the four artists (Rantakallio n2015a; n2015b; n2015c; n2015d; n2015e; n2015f; n2016; n2017).[15]

2.2.1 Setting up

I conducted a total of 10 interviews during 2015–2017. I performed two individual interviews with each rapper except only one with RPK, and additionally one e-mail interview with Ameeba and one joint interview with Julma Henri and RPK. As background research, I also interviewed VJ Sellekhanks (Sellekhanks i2015) who has done numerous live visuals, promotional shoots, and music videos for the artists of my study. The length of the interviews varied between one and two hours (see references for details). I have generally not included details of my private communication with the artists (via text messages or over the phone) into the research material. When I have utilized our e-mail communication or messaging for analysis, I have asked separately for permission to do so.

My preunderstanding of the field crucially affected the set up of the study (see also subchapter 1.4). A bit before and also after approaching the artists for interviews, I read various books on interviewing (e.g. Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006; Berg 2009; Warren & Karner 2010) and tried to prepare myself for conducting semi-structured interviews. Before contacting any of the artists, I spent roughly 18 months doing background research, including social media observations, reading available interviews of the artists and related topics, watching Finnish rap music videos and live shows, and listening to rap music. My "deeper" initiation to Finnish rap has been rather recent, and therefore I wanted to ensure I gather enough experience of *other* Finnish rap artists as well in order to better comprehend and perhaps compare the artists in my study to

[15] While I conducted altogether ten interviews, there are only eight separate field notes. I integrated my notes of the first Julma Henri interview (Julma Henri i2015) into my field work diary, as this interview was part of my observational trip to Turku (Rantakallio f2016). I did not write notes on the e-mail interview I conducted (Ameeba i2017).

the larger scene and various styles of rap music in Finland. This necessarily meant spending less time listening to rappers from other countries, including the US.

I also spent a significant amount of time listening to the music of the four rappers in this study, and had done so already prior to this research. I decided to focus my attention on the music they have released during 2010s although I also listened to whatever else I could find as background information: this was mainly due to an easier access to these newer recordings as opposed to earlier ones and their relevancy to my research topic and the artists' current career stage. With underground artists such as the ones under scrutiny in this study, releases are not necessarily available for streaming or purchase, as the number of pressings are small and potentially sold out. Also, because revenues are considerably smaller for underground artists than for major label artists, underground artists do not always put their music on streaming services. Particularly in Ameeba's case, most of his releases are not available in streaming services. This is partially true with the other artists: although most of their music is available either in streaming services, as physical records, or on YouTube, some is not. Several of RPK's releases from the 1990s and early 2000s (such as *A Day of the People in Between*, Ceebrolistics 1998) are sold out and not streamable. Bootlegs of some of these underground publications, however, can be found on YouTube. The situation also changed to some extent during my research, as the artists for example added older releases to their Spotify catalogue or removed them.

In conducting interviews, I more or less adapted a semi-structured, theme-based interviewing technique (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006). While I partially used the same question format for interviewing each of the four artists, I did not pose the exact same questions but rather formulated questions around the same themes (music making, being a performing and recording artist, lyrical content, relationship with mainstream music and fans etc.) while better adjusting them to fit the flow of the conversation and the individual artist. This entailed follow-up questions, for example, which were not premeditated. This was part of my efforts to make the interviews more conversational. I also decided against asking certain questions although having written them in advance, realizing due to some of the answers I received during the interview that my questions were irrelevant or simply repetitive. I have listed below the main themes that recurred in my interviews, with slight variations in the way I posed the questions in each case:

- personal history with rap music (listening to and making rap)
- musical influences (artists, genres, literature, societal events etc.)
- personal tastes in music making/listening: what is "good"/ "bad" rap music?
- artist roles (for example various aliases)
- authenticity

- what characterizes "underground" music? do you consider yourself an underground artist?
- role of the audience for music making
- social media
- spiritual/atheistic themes in music: where do they come from, what they consist of

Apart from Khid, my interviewees knew me through social media before our first face-to-face interview. I was already friends with Ameeba and RPK on Facebook, and Julma Henri and I followed each other on Twitter and later also become Facebook friends. I also knew Sellekhanks through Instagram. In all these cases, our social media connection also entailed interactivity, such as likes and/or comments. However, my own media appearances as a researcher had tipped the artists that I was a rap researcher writing about them; for example, Ameeba mentioned he had happened to listen to a hip hop radio show where I was a guest in 2014.

When I first began planning to get in touch with the rappers in 2014, and then contacted them via e-mail one artist at a time in 2015, I suspected I would need to persuade the artists in some way to share their time with me, as the interviewing would likely take several sessions. I assumed that the four rappers were not going to receive much visibility to their art through my research, and even if they were, not in the near future. I also wanted to bring to the fore early on that I was interested in the spiritual message of their music, which is not a common topic of public discussion in Finland and thus can be a sensitive issue. As a researcher following mainstream media portrayals of religiousity and spirituality, the articles oftentimes appear exoticizing or borderline ridiculing, for example when discussing immigrants (cf. e.g. Korhonen 2013) or when dealing with seemingly marginal forms of religiosity such as belief in angels (Rissanen 2016).[16] I also openly expressed to the artists that my initial interest in their music has been the result of my own enjoyment

[16] I have also been present in a working paper seminar for doctoral students where the professor in charge openly laughed and ridiculed New Age related spiritual beliefs and experiences such as channeling which were the subject of one student's PhD research. I have equally seen colleagues laughing at certain spiritual traits in the music of my study's artists when I myself have presented a paper. Given that even academically accomplished individuals have trouble holding their personal opinions to themselves and fail to show professionalism in their conduct, it is safe to assume that the general public will not be much more equipped to abstain from similarly immature behavior when dealing with so-called alternative forms of religiosity. It must be noted, however, that the aforementioned (Finnish) scholars were not from the field of study of religions, where the above described behavior would arguably cause serious concerns about whether the person is suitable for participating in research seminars or conducting unbiased research.

of it, and hip hop and related genres in general. My own background as a rap listener and particularly the fact that all artists knew each other beforehand – and also knew they were all participating in my study – all shaped the context of the interviews and how the artists discussed the topics with me.

In the next section, I further describe and reflect on the artist interviews which I conducted during 2015–2017.

2.2.2 Reflections on artist interviews

As stated, the central research material consists of my interviews with Ameeba, Julma Henri, RPK, and Khid. In some cases, I met the rappers approximately two weeks after approaching them via e-mail with an interview request, and in some cases, months later. I never showed the artists my list of questions beforehand, as I did not want them to overthink their answers but rather wished to gain spontaneous reflections. I did, however, roughly characterize my research interests and the themes and topics so they would know what to expect, also assuming that they would want to know what the interview is about before agreeing to do it. My initial concern was whether the artists would agree to give me interviews, and particularly whether Julma Henri, who has kept his identity and face a secret thus far, would trust me enough to figuratively take down his mask. It turned out all artists were highly responsive. I tried to make it clear from the start that my project was in-depth and would likely require minimum of two long interviews from each of them.

During our conversations, the four artists clearly assumed that I was an informed member of the hip hop community and followed their activities actively; for example, they sometimes asked me during the interview when their last live performance took place, or how the lyrics of their song go if we were addressing a specific song. The fact that I was close to the same age as the artists likely aided in creating a rapport with them and affected the kinds of assumptions they made of me and I of them: for example, assuming and subsequently discussing shared experiences of societal events or popular culture. A degree of trust was also built, as the rappers sometimes disclosed information to me about their future releases or other plans which, as I found out, they were not necessarily prepared to share with journalists.[17] With one of the artists, our relationship grew closer to a friendship than

[17] For example, Julma Henri declined to answer whether or not he was planning to release yet another album when he was interviewed on the radio around the time his album *Julma H* came out in 2015. Yet, he had discussed that matter months earlier with me off the record. Likewise, Ameeba and VJ Sellekhanks revealed information concerning future music-related endeavors during interviews, but made it clear that it was still unofficial; hence I do not refer to these directly in this study either, as some of these plans never transpired.

merely interviewer-interviewee, and we exchanged some amount of communication outside the interview situations and his live performances. I consider that our friendship, extending the professional relationship, affected my interest in his general well-being as a person and also increased his interest in my research – as would normally be the case with any friendship. Like for example ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon, I too have pondered if fieldwork demands keeping a certain distance to informants, and if forming a friendship might "dissolve fieldwork, make it into something else" (Titon 2008: 40). I came to the conclusion that a certain amount of friendship and reciprocity with the artists was beneficial, but a closer association such as spending time together outside work settings would likely be counterproductive in many ways.

Some of the interviews took place at sites that are not perhaps the most typical: my apartment, a moving car, and outdoors in nature. Three interviews took place in a restaurant/bar, and two at a studio. I typically offered the artists some suggestions about locations but asked them to make the decision, as it was important to me that they felt comfortable in order for the interview to be succesful. Doing field work in your home country, and even literally in my home (first interview with Ameeba), confirmed to me that "'home' is as constructed as the 'field.'" (Stock & Chiener 2008: 113). Ethnomusicologists Jonathan Stock and Chou Chiener (2008: 112–113) suggest that although there may be such shared social codes as language, vernacular, and general cultural interaction, there may be other matters distancing us from our informants, in my case for example gender.

The hip hop scene is male dominated in Finland like everywhere else, and thus I knew that doing research on four men as a woman, I am in the position of an Other. My gender may or may not have been a beneficial factor, likely both, which possibly reflected on their behavior around me as friendly, gentlemanly, or (once or twice) borderline flirtatious. So far, I have not come across reflections in literature on how gender may *grant* access due to male-female social codes in a heteronormative environment[18], having instead found only (multiple) discussions on non-access due to socio-cultural boundaries between men and women (e.g. Beaudry 2008; Speers 2014: 99; see also Järviluoma et al. 2003). Yet, some such boundaries were without a doubt also in evidence during my field work due to my gender: hip hop is a highly masculine culture where female presence is still rare and non-normative. Men may generally be courteous towards women asking them a favor, yet also do not necessarily feel comfortable when a woman enters a generally "male" space such as a recording studio. I sensed a certain reservedness on some occasions, although I suspect this may have been due to my status as a researcher more than my gender,

[18] See Newton (1993) for a discussion on how being gay may grant access to gay circles.

as somewhat of an outsider to the hip hop scene (most of the interviews took place at a time when I was not yet a radio host/DJ). It is possible that the questions themselves were also different and in-depth comparing to what the artists were used to answering in media interviews, which may have caused them to feel perplexed or even uncomfortable during our interviews. When meeting the artists at clubs or other situations several months after I had finished interviewing them, I noticed our interaction to be much more relaxed, likely because there were much less expectations or obligations on either side. I also suspect that my increased media visibility as a radio host and scholar had helped the artists position me and my role in the scene whereas when I first met them, the artists expressed a slightly bewildered attitude towards my work.[19]

My first interview out of the four artists was with Ameeba in early 2015 (Ameeba i2015a). While I knew he seldomly gave interviews, I had not expected he would have several reservations towards interviews in general, only that he might be slightly uncomfortable around a person he did not know beforehand. Ameeba admitted that he was initially nervous about me being a "fan"; I had disclosed in an e-mail prior to our first interview that I had listened to his music already before my research project although not using this specific word. Ameeba hardly answered the questions during the first half-an-hour and his body language was rather closed. I realized that what I had anticipated was indeed required to create a trust necessary for the interview to work: I had to behave in an "authentic" way (like my personal self) instead of restricting myself to the role of a researcher/interviewer. I chose to share aspects of my personal background as a researcher, some of my personal experiences in relation to our topics (such as attending a concert) and made conversation in between questions. I received an e-mail shortly after the interview, where Ameeba mentioned having appreciated how "natural" and "without roles" we had both appeared. Later on, however, this made it somewhat challenging to find a suitable balance between building a friendship and being professional in my task (more on this topic see Järviluoma 2010; Schneidermann 2018). However, the strategy proved to be at least somewhat beneficial for arranging a second interview and receiving help in general in conducting my research. My second interview with Ameeba (Ameeba i2015b) in spring 2015 was more relaxed, but yielded slightly less information than the first one.

[19] It should be noted that during the past years, an increasing amount of books on Finnish rap music and rappers have been published (e.g. Friman 2016) or are scheduled to be published (e.g. Similä & Hietaneva forthcoming 2020). It has thus become more commonplace that Finnish artists are interviewed by journalists or scholars in-depth, which was not the case in 2013 when I began my research.

If we consider this in Berg's (2009: 128) terms, I was trying to escape "evasion tactics" by sharing some of my own experiences, thus building a more genuine rapport through a more conversational approach, what I would call a "role without a role," thus shaping the way I was perceived by my interviewee. This in fact led to us finding common ground through shared experiences, such as "always being on" professionally (working nearly constantly and not always knowing how to switch off), financial insecurity, and passion for what we do, although Berg (2009: 130) states that shared traits or experiences are not a prerequisite for interviewing, and of course that "no interviewer and his or her subject are exactly alike." Particularly feminist research has emphasized the importance of self-disclosure of the interviewer in order to break power positions between the interviewee and interviewer (Berg 2009: 131).

However, some amount of control over the situation is necessary for the interview to work (Berg 2009: 131). In the end, the two face-to-face interviews with Ameeba were not the best method in his case due to his reservedness. I thus decided to try e-mail interview in addition, as his e-mail answers to me had been rather long, demonstrating that he seems to prefer written communication. When receiving his answers months after sending the initial e-mail, I noticed the e-mail interview provided substantially more information. Clearly, it is important to be able to adapt research methods taking into consideration the informants. In fact, some of Ameeba's responses in the e-mail interview were so informative that I decided to write a popular magazine article about him, using an interview format (Rantakallio 2018b) because I knew that only a handful of the answers could be included in the present study. It was also a way for me to "pay back"[20] the time Ameeba had shared with me: the article ran on the cover of monthly *Voima* magazine, a free newspaper which has a circulation of 70 000 copies, thus offering visibility for him and his music.

Berg (2009: 131) also mentions that physical appearance and body language are meaningful in interviewing, and this was also something I thought about to an extent. I did not, however, aim to change my clothing style for it to be more (or less) "hip hop" than it was, as my posing would surely not have gone unnoticed and would potentially cause mistrust. I aimed instead to wear clothes that I was comfortable in, the style of which arguably reflects mainstream consumer fashion. While I did not consciously think about bodily gestures, I did reflect on my vocabulary before,

[20] Knowing that there was no possible means to repay the artists for their time and intellectual effort – and, indirectly, their craft also providing me a livelihood for almost five years – I tried to express my gratitude in smaller ways, such as providing them with video material of their live performance I had recorded with my phone, and bought their physical records instead of only streaming. I also mentioned their works and/or issues that came up in our interviews (with their permission) on the Rap Scholar radio show, thus offering them visibility.

during, and after interviewing and how it co-constructed the meanings in those situations. I am a Helsinki native, thus my natural vocabulary has some features of the urban lingo of the capital city, typical perhaps of a certain age group (in this case young adults). The Helsinki area dialect or slang and rap lingo are not by any means clearly separable, but rather mixed.

A certain faux-pas or error that I have discussed with some researcher colleagues (who admitted having committed it, too) is to step on the interviewees proverbial toes: cutting the interviewee's story with a (sometimes impatient) remark or follow-up question or even a completely new question before the interviewee has finished answering. This often occurs due to nervousness of the interviewer who, unable to handle the silence which often merely suggests thinking taking place, tries to take control of the situation and avoid potential awkwardness, for example. Unfortunately, in my experience this often happens without the interviewer noticing until later when replaying the recording of the interview. My inexperience as an interviewer manifested also in my inability to pose follow-up questions after key sentences that featured amidst the narration; I have spent many hours mourning for the loss of these moments.

My second interview was with VJ, graffiti artist and educator Sellekhanks in early 2015, and focused on how and why the artists use certain visual material and what they seek to achieve with it. Our interview took place at his workspace in Helsinki, where he also showed me some unreleased material both from past and forthcoming releases, such as the music video for Ameeba's song "Kummituseläin" which was released later that same year. While in the end I used this material only as background, as I realized I needed to narrow down both data and overall scope of my research, it became clear that music videos and live visuals as well as promotional shoots are a collaborative effort which reflects not only the vision of the rappers but to a large extent the vision that Sellekhanks or others have of their music and style – and that the artists trust him to do so. Additionally, Sellekhanks gave me the contact information for the other three artists (Khid, RPK, Julma Henri).

My third interview was a slight surprise. I had sent a request via e-mail in March 2015 to interview the two members of Euro Crack (RPK and Julma Henri) first together and then separately. While their response was positive, we were unable to set a fixed date for the interview(s). However, Julma Henri suddenly approached me via private message on Twitter in late March, asking to do the interview that same night in Turku, where he was performing at Left Alliance politician Li Andersson's party which was organized as part of her campaign to run for parliament.[21] After

[21] Julma Henri has publicly supported the Left Alliance and especially its young female politicians by performing in their events and by posting about them on Facebook and Twitter (Rantakallio f2016; f2017).

several missed messages and calls both ways, I jumped into his car with a 15-minute-warning and without a proper recording device or a sheet with interview questions, as I had been at the gym when he called. Thus, I recorded the interview with my phone while we were driving to Turku. In Turku, we parted ways, but I saw the concert later that night.

I had at first hesitated whether to travel to Turku suddenly like this, but I concluded that if an artist suggests a meeting, I, as a researcher, should be prepared at all times. Since I did not have a paper with questions with me, the situation seemed more conversational than the other interviews I did. I also noticed how naturally Julma Henri seems to speak about his religious views as well as his political views. This may or may not have to do with the fact that he has shared them already in his music and social media. He asked about my religious views, too; sociologists Carol Warren and Tracy Karner (2010: 65) state that some settings may be hard to access in case the researcher "does not share beliefs or values with the members." I consider that my knowledge of the rappers' music and hip hop in general as well as the literature of spiritual ideas they convey was necessary and helpful for my research. Especially in Julma Henri's case this seemed to be true, as we were able to have a more informed conversation about Eastern religions and new spirituality.

The joint Euro Crack interview later in spring 2015, as well as my one-on-one with RPK in fall 2015 took place at RPK's studio room. RPK was clearly a very experienced interviewee. I also felt that this perhaps affected RPK to keep more distance than the others: for example, I do not recall him asking me any questions that did not relate directly to my PhD research, whereas with the other rappers we had conversations about other things as well in the course of the interviews and outside those situations. This perceived distance between us is potentially also a reason why he was, in the end, reluctant to allow me to use most of the interview material; as I requested to do one more interview with him in late 2017 in order to make more explicit questions about his religious worldview (the issue had not been directly addressed in prior interviews), he stated that he does not wish to play a part in my research in the way originally planned, considering withdrawing from my study altogether. While this was of course a disappointment, after careful consideration on both sides we found a compromise which suited the both of us, and decided that his role in my study is more of a producer and collaborative artist and not a rapper whose spiritual worldviews I zoom into. He apologized for changing his mind on the matter. In retrospect, this necessary narrowing down of my focus may have been beneficial for the overall study. After our conversations over the phone in late 2017 and early 2018, I sent RPK two different versions of the interview extracts I planned to use, first a longer version, then after no reply, a shortened one. RPK then confirmed to me via e-mail that I can use the latter version.

Two interview sessions took place during 2015–16 with Khid, who appeared the most experienced out of the four rappers in giving interviews. I had done a tentative close reading of his music video "Luoti" ("Bullet," Khid x RPK 2014b) before our interviews from a similar viewpoint as the one I had applied for Euro Crack and Ameeba, which was that of new spirituality influenced especially by Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta (non-dualistic strand in Hinduism). However, during the first interview Khid explained having taken a new turn in his religious worldviews and then professed atheism. I thus realized that my reading of his previous music had been uninformed and even misleading. He admitted the spiritual tendencies there, but those tendencies were clearly not simplistic nor the kind portrayed in the music of the others. Accordingly, I reformulated many of my questions for our second interview, dealing in more detail with his atheism, which acts as a metaphor for many things in his music. Unexpected themes commonly manifest during ethnographic research and may become significant for the overall study (Wood 2007: 166). Similarly, atheism was a theme I did not originally anticipate to study. It is therefore possible to state that discovering atheism as a prominent theme in Khid's music is, in itself, one result of this study. It became clear to me that interviewing artists is an important way of gaining insights into their art and to enable an informed reading of their works.

My final face-to-face interview took place in May 2017 with Julma Henri. By then, we had interacted in social media to some extent, and this was clearly visible in our interaction when we met for the third time. It became clear, for example, that we shared certain anti-racist values, thus it seemed that we were on the same page, so to speak. Of course, we had both changed as well in those two years that had passed in between the interviews. I myself had gained more expertise and confidence as a researcher, which reflected in the interview situation as being able to ask questions more directly.

As these stories exemplify, flexibility is one of the key characteristics of a researcher doing field research. Patience is another, as artists may have very busy schedules – or they simply forget to reply – and may take days or even months to answer, and hence an opening for an interview may be sudden or the duration of field research may be longer than expected. Due to the "human factor" things often do not go as planned. Thus writing a field work diary and notes has been crucial for me to reflect on my interaction with the artists.

As regards the ethical side of the research, I emphasized to all my interviewees that they have a final say in which parts of the direct quotations will end up printed in the final work. After finishing transcribing all the interviews, I requested all four rappers to review the transcriptions and to inform me if they can be used as such or contain parts they wish to be omitted. I considered using a written consent form, but for similar reasons as discussed by cultural studies scholar Tuomas Järvenpää (2017:

76) I felt that such formality might cause mistrust rather than convince the artists of my ethical priorities, so much so that they might refuse to do interviews altogether. Also, this would have underlined the difference between a researcher and a journalist, to which many ethnomusicologists are likened (Järvenpää 2017: 70–71), and I suspect that also the four artists in this study considered my interviews with them as similar to in-depth journal articles which they are used to doing. All four artists gave written permission (via e-mail) to utilize the material after going over them. Ameeba also asked for the full recorded tapes of our two interviews for himself, and I gave him the audio files. I felt that this would be the fairest of solutions for both myself and the artists; if they said something on tape that they did not want to go public, they still had the chance to withdraw. However, as mentioned due to RPK's explicit request, only few selected parts of his interviews are included in this study, as he expressed reluctance to share his personal worldviews.

This is somewhat similar to what Westinen (2014: 308–309) terms "partial ethnographic monitoring," meaning that the researcher offers the informants a chance to review the material co-produced with the researcher. However, unlike Westinen (2014), I did not offer to submit my analysis for the artists to review beforehand as it would have been rather time consuming, and also because I was afraid it might cause misunderstandings due to my theoretical and methodological stance, social constructionism and discourse analysis, which the artists are not necessarily familiar with. My decision not to share my analysis with the artists can be criticized as othering and as enforcing a boundary and power position between researcher and informant.

There were issues that I only learned after the first interviews. It was somewhat challenging to get answers to certain questions from the artists, for example relating to their personal tastes in music and aesthetics. This was possibly a result of my inexperience in conducting interviews, inadequate formulation of questions, and lack of understanding regarding their music making, but also, "when we ask our musical friends for their 'native' points of view […] they most often speak in terms of personal experience and understanding rather than systematic explanation" (Titon 2008: 36).

One issue that researchers doing discourse analysis often need to address is how they co-construct discourses with other people. I was occasionally interrogated about my approach when discussing my work at academic seminars, and even accused of feeding ideas into the mouths of the artists. However, projecting a positivistic idea of objectivity and seeming neutrality onto interview situations is a misunderstanding of the ethnographic and discourse analytic method. The interviewer by necessity takes part in the conversation in order to solicit answers. In my case, this meant for example asking about the pervasive dichotomy between mainstream and underground music. It is possible to argue that I could have posed questions about

the topic without explicitly mentioning the issue as a dichotomy; however, framing this approach as leading the interviewee or somehow compromising the validity of this research is an inaccurate representation of the situation when my methodological approach *presumes* that knowledge production is intergenerated in social interaction. If the aim had been to generate organic knowledge about the subject, I would have had to remove myself from the interview situation entirely, which was not in my interests. Equally, the ethnographic method assumes the "human factor"; we are not invisible in the field, thus assuming that our presence does not factor into the results and analysis would be a dangerous misrepresentation of the research process. Hence, I have frequently included my interview questions in the extracts in order to highlight this process.

2.2.3 Participant observation

I chose to do also participant observation as "interviews might miss the action entirely" (Guest et al. 2013: 77). Participant observation is a rather common method in the ethnographic study of underground music scenes (see e.g. Thornton 1995; Kwame Harrison 2009; Speers 2014). There were several things I was able to observe as an audience member at live rap performances and by following the rappers on social media, which informed me to discuss certain related themes with the artists in interviews: their repertoire, their fan base, the sizes of their audiences, their stage presence, their social media presence and more generally, the Finnish rap underground scene. I wrote down notes after almost each concert performance I saw by the artists, altogether 19 concert or DJ performances between December 2013 and August 2016. I attended several of these already a year before contacting the artists for interviews, and on average, one concert every other month during 2013–2016. During that period, the artists' collaboration was continuous; when the live performance line-up officially included only one of the four artists, either one or several of them typically came on stage to feature in the songs they have recorded together. Alternatively, it was not uncommon that the artists performed at the same venue the same night. All my observations took place in Helsinki except for one performance by Julma Henri in Turku in 2015. Most of the venues where these concerts were organized were small or mid-size clubs, with a capacity of a few hundred to a few thousand people. The Flow Festival tent or indoor venues, where I observed the artists in August 2014 and August 2016 in Helsinki, were no exception to this. As stated in the introduction of this study, the size of these venues also attests to the argument of the artists' underground status; Finnish mainstream rappers perform at arenas and festival main stages, only rarely doing club concerts, and these usually entail tours instead of one-off shows.

Besides writing notes on my phone, I also took pictures or short videos of the performances with my phone to help me write about the concerts.[22] I then wrote a proper description of the event at home on my computer as soon as possible, either in the early hours when arriving home, or the next day. In the beginning, I was still very much a novice and did not write sufficiently detailed descriptions about the concerts; attending the concerts was more about familiarizing myself with the artists' music and their audience, and thus about informing my interviews. My notes were merely half a page in 2013, whereas in 2016 they extended to 5–6 pages, with detailed descriptions about the venue, audience, songs performed, the artists' demeanor etc. Admittedly, these were perhaps more just "direct" observations rather than those of a participant as I did not engage with other concert goers or the artists, apart from the usual applause, shouts etc. Some observations that I collected during concerts aided me in the formulation of interview questions as well as in analyzing the interviews and other material. In short, those field diaries helped me see "the bigger picture" and acquire "tacit knowledge" about my research topic (cf. Speers 2014: 90).

For researchers today, social media very often expands the field of ethnography as scholars communicate with informants and follow their lives (Schneidermann 2018). I have also observed the artists' social media use (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) since roughly 2012 (beginning field work in 2013) to 2017 for a more in-depth understanding of their artistic image and communication with their audience (Rantakallio f2017), paying special attention when the rappers shared content related to the spiritual and/or aesthetic qualities in their music. In the beginning of my research, I made a copy of nearly every public post the artists shared on Facebook. I have at no stage used any status updates intended to a selected audience or private messages, only analyzing the artists' public profiles, and never their private accounts. As my research progressed, I continued to follow the artists, but only very selectively made copies of their public social media posts anymore.

Although the social media data have been supplementary in my work, social media today is a crucial discursive space for representing aspects of oneself and for creating communities (Seargeant & Tagg 2013), hence I argue that when an artist has an online presence – a Facebook profile or Bandcamp page for example – a researcher must take this online identity into account in trying to understand their artist persona. Also, the four artists in this study knew me through social media before we met face-to-face; it thus functioned as a channel for them to contact me

[22] When showing any material publicly, for example to illustrate conference presentations, I made sure that outsiders such as audience members cannot be recognized from the photos or videos.

and vice versa in addition to e-mail. Especially underground artists do not have a large machinery taking care of their social media communications, instead they usually create the updates and share content themselves. Social media presence comprises not only sharing content but networking and community building (Poore 2014: 5); thus social media can function as an important tool when reaching out to fans, sometimes potentially creating a stronger connection between listeners and artist particularly if the artist shares content that is perceived as more personal and more "authentic" by followers. All of this suggests that social media is a key aspect and a significant medium for anyone doing ethnography today.

During face-to-face interviews, I usually included one or two questions about a specific or general social media activity of the artists, such as a status update. I have in this way combined both online and offline observations in my study. Sociologist Robert Kozinets (2010: 65) calls this kind of field work "'blended' ethnography/netnography," entailing "a combination of data gathered in face-to-face as well as online interaction." In the end, only two examples from my social media data, one screen shot of Julma Henri's Facebook page (Rantakallio f2017) and one of Ameeba's Bandcamp page (Ameeba 2015a), were included in my analysis chapters. However, the online field work (Rantakallio f2017) has informed this study more broadly.

2.3 Analysis

The methodological toolkit used in analysis in this work consists of discourse analysis combined with audiovisual close reading. As discourse analysis is by nature interdisciplinary (Fairclough 2000: 74), it seems particularly suitable for mixed data and mixed methods study such as the present one. However, neither discourse analysis nor close reading should be understood as strict methods but rather as analytical approaches aiming to describe how cultural meanings are constructed while acknowledging the crucial role of interpretation of the researcher. According to the social constructionist view which this study takes, social and cultural realities are understood to be constructed in interaction through language, but also through visual and sonic means. As existing theorizations and applications of discourse analysis have rarely been adapted to analyze audiovisual entities, in my work discourse analysis has been supplemented with audiovisual close reading, a form of detailed cultural and contextual analysis. These two methodological approaches are intertwined and complimentary in this study, and are applied together with an interdisciplinary theoretical framework on authenticity and post-Christian worldviews (see theory subchapter 3.2).

2.3.1 Discourse analysis and audiovisual close reading

Discourse analysis

Discourses are often called "meaning systems" which refers to the complex interconnectedness of and multiple mechanisms through which discourses contribute to and compete with one another. More importantly, this characterization refers to the view according to which discourses affect social reality by constructing knowledge, ideas, and ideologies. Discourses are also highly situational and contextual, thus analyzing the context in which they occur is crucial in discourse analysis. (Jokinen et al. 2016: 26–29, 34.) Investigating discourses can also afford insights into the social and cultural formation of music and people's relationship with music, which is why the discourse analytic approach was chosen here to study underground rap and ideas about authenticity and worldviews.

Scholars of social work Arja Jokinen et al. (2016: 35) highlight that analyzing discourses is not about accounting for all the facts and traits of the text, but about constructing an "informed interpretation" which is guided by the research questions and chosen theoretical-methodological angle. Hence, the discourses are not self-evidently existing in the data nor is the data taken to be self-explanatory, but rather, discourses appear as a result of the researcher's interpretation (Jokinen et al. 2016: 35). Consequently, a crucial premise in discourse analysis is that the researcher co-constructs and negotiates discourses not only in the interview situation, but also upon interpretation, thus being very much part of the social surroundings and influenced by discourses and tending to reify them at least to some extent (Jokinen et al. 2016: 31; Jokinen & Juhila 2016: 76, fn2.).

A central point of departure in discourse analysis is that discourse analysis is "just" the analysis of discourses, how they are constructed, how they work and what their consequences are, and not of whether the material represents the "actual" thoughts or mental states of people (Jokinen et al. 2016: 28–29; Potter & Wetherell 1987: 178), nor their "underlying attitudes or dispositions" (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 49). Hence, also the incoherencies and inconsistencies in discursive material are taken to be normal. The attention is instead on "discourse itself; how it is organized and what it is doing" (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 49). The assumption in my analysis has been that the artists have responded through their artist persona(s) in my interviews and thus their answers do not necessarily reflect the "real" persons behind them (even when they claim so themselves) although their personalities and personal realities are part of same human being interacting with the world (cf. Auslander 2004: 6–7). The correspondence between "reality" and discourse is not of interest in research where the discourse analytic approach is used because discourses themselves are taken to be part of reality and not some separate phenomena outside

of everyday life (Jokinen et al. 2016: 29; Anttonen 2017a: 51). As articulated by religious studies scholar, Russell T. McCutcheon (2003: 22–23), the focus of such a study is thus on "the production of seamless meanings and identities, and thus the containment of competing meanings and identities" rather than on "which meaning is right and which is wrong."

There are multiple ways of doing discourse analysis, depending on the researcher's disciplinary background and theoretical toolkit (see also Suoninen 2016: 230–231, fn.1). Consequently, also my disciplinary background and research interests affected my choice of material and methods. For example, whereas linguist Norman Fairclough (2000; 2003) has been influential in developing discourse analysis from a linguistic perspective, with a special focus on the textual analysis of media texts, my approach turns more towards cultural studies. In my analysis, this approach manifests itself mainly as lesser (though not complete lack of) focus on grammar and interactional details, such as hesitation, pauses, sentence connectors (but, however, also etc.), sidetracking, and as more focus on the *content* of what is being said (or rapped) and in what context, and what are the possible connections to broader socio-cultural phenomena. In this sense, my analytical approach is closer to how poststructuralist sociologist Michel Foucault (1972) conceptualizes discourse analysis as a contextualized analysis of historic continuities and discontinuities of complex meaning systems which are entangled in social practices and power structures. While my work is a case study of four artists, it is also a study of historically persistent ideas about musical authenticity, alternative forms of music making (within the larger music industry), and spiritual and atheistic ideas. The main reason for focusing on artist interviews instead of just media articles or music was that while I was interested in what the artists do, I was even more curious about how they make sense of (i.e. construct) certain ideas about spirituality or atheism and authenticity in relation to their music, and their musical activities and the meanings they attach to them.

The analysis of the research material did not take place in a linear fashion – research rarely does – albeit my process roughly corresponds to how Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2006: 156) describe the analysis of ethnographic data. I transcribed all my interviews within a week from having conducted each of them, so that I could write comments on aspects that I still remembered but would likely forget soon. Details about transcription conventions can be found below in section 2.3.2. I made hard copies of my interview transcriptions, as they were easier for me to process as a whole in this way. When doing online field work, I saved the social media data into digital format (PDF or JPG), but did not make hard copies as I did not plan to do a systematic analysis of that particular piece of data.

I coded themes into the hard copies of the interviews while reading and re-reading them, and also highlighted interesting passages or wrote comments in

margins in the digital files. I then formed larger categories of ideas that appeared to be connected, such as music aesthetics, realness/authenticity, religion, audience, and music industry. While highlighting certain words or passages, I noticed that the artists sometimes gave contradictory remarks or remarkably similar statements either within a single interview or between two or several interviews; this demonstrates the situationality of discourses and thus the analysis should look at "how they [consistency and inconsistency] are used, variably, as argumentative or rhetorical strategies" (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 38). Looking at these consistencies and inconsistencies has been central in my application of discourse analysis. Although my aim has not been to conduct strict linguistic analysis, I have paid attention to some properties of language in analyzing how different topics are constructed especially since the central research material consists of interviews (spoken language). Equally, vocabulary and choice of words matter (Fairclough 2000: 76–77).

Although discourse analysis is often defined as the analysis of language use, indeed both Fairclough (2000: 3–5) and Foucault (1972: 28, 100) have noted that manifestations of discourse are not limited to language, but also visual "texts" are products of discourses and contribute to them (see also Jokinen et al. 2016: 34; cf. Anttonen 2017a: 52). However, neither Foucault nor Fairclough have written their seminal theories about discourse and its use during what I call the age of the digital audiovisual. By this, I refer to current digitalized societies where an almost constant flood of information is pouring from screens nearly everywhere we go, from interactive billboards to smart phones, rendering technology so omnipresent that spending a full day without looking at any screens becomes a challenge. To cope with this reality, studies that focus on audiovisual formats have by now become an established part of cultural studies, expanding from film and media studies to cover analyses of gaming and social media (e.g. Richardson et al. eds. 2013). An object of discourse analysis or "text" (Fairclough 2000) can thus also be a picture, a movie, or a music video for instance; this is referred to as multimodal discourse analysis (Paltridge 2012: 170), influenced by linguist M.A.K. Halliday's idea of semiotic resources, where language is considered but one of many possible means of social and cultural signifying. The possibilities of a multimodal analysis more generally have been embraced by a growing number of researchers in popular music and popular culture studies (e.g. Heinonen 2005; Välimäki 2008; 2015; Skaniakos 2010; Richardson et al. eds. 2013; Richardson 2012; Pääkkölä 2016; Mononen 2018). Musicologist Yrjö Heinonen (2005: 7), adapting a Faircloughian framework of discourse analysis for cultural music analysis, outlines that (cultural) music research can approach discourses in music either by looking at music itself (song structure, instrumentation, lyrics etc.) or the discussion about music (reviews, interviews etc.). Heinonen (2005) thus suggests that it is possible to analyze music and moving image

by adapting and applying discourse analysis according to the research object.[23] This has also been my analytical approach. Accordingly, applying discourse analysis to music and moving image in this study is combined with close reading.

Close reading

My main influences in using close reading as a method for close cultural analysis have come from musicologist John Richardson's theorizations on close reading (2012; 2016a; 2016b) as well as from cultural studies scholar Mieke Bal's (2002) work on concepts and frames. Also Carol Vernallis' seminal work (2004) on music videos has been important for my analysis. The close reading of three music videos in this study (in chapter 5) through a conceptual apparatus based on the two major themes in this study, authenticity and worldviews, is also influenced by my background in religious studies, cultural musicology, and hip hop studies.

The term "reading," as the name suggests, entails not only cultural analysis but interpretation (Richardson 2016a: 116–117; cf. also Auslander 2004: 4), which is also central in discourse analysis; we choose to focus on certain cultural elements of "texts" rather than all of them. In this sense, my analytical "track" (Richardson 2016a: 136) or focus in this study has been authenticity and spiritual/atheistic worldviews, informing the meticulous examination of what goes on in the music videos' visuals, music, and lyrics. "Cultural" in cultural analysis refers to the objects of analysis being considered as part of "the larger culture from which they have emerged" (Bal 2002: 16), whereas "analysis" pertains to "issues of cultural relevance and aims to articulate how the object contributes to cultural debates" (Bal 2002: 16). Close reading music videos, for example, is not an effort aiming at reading the artist's or video director's mind and writing what they wanted to convey; like Bal (2002: 16) bluntly formulates, "[i]t is not the artist or the author but the objects they make and 'give' to the public domain that are the 'speakers' in analytic discussion." Rather, close reading is an interpretation grounded on theoretical understanding about the contextual and cultural framework within which the object of analysis has been produced and released; it is thus read in its "physical and discursive cultural settings" (Richardson 2016b: 157; see also Torvinen forthcoming 2020).

Additionally, close reading relies on detailed description, which also reveals that the method is to some extent indebted to phenomenology (Richardson 2012: 12–13). Using discourse analysis and audiovisual close reading together in this study seems suitable considering also to which extent both approaches have been affected by the

[23] See also sociologist Monique Charles' (2018) MDA (Music Discourse Analysis) method, which relies on multiple types of data and analysis of sounds, lyrics, interviews, and field observations.

turn of many scholars across various cultural studies disciplines (particularly those focusing on the audiovisual) towards performance and performativity (Richardson 2012: 12–19). Audiovisual research is also, according to Richardson (2012: 11), closely (and, as Richardson argues, by necessity) connected with academic criticism. Academic criticism in the context of cultural musicology pertains particularly to musicologist Joseph Kerman's demand for a style of academic writing which "does not hesitate to relate musical sounds to surrounding discursive formations" (quoted in Richardson 2012: 11).

There are arguably about as many ways of doing close reading as there are scholars claiming to use the approach; close reading also has many names, such as close analysis, depending on who and with what kind of disciplinary background such analysis is carried out (for examples, see Richardson 2016a: 115–116). In hip hop studies, examples of close reading include Tricia Rose's (1994) and Adam Krims's (2000) works. Close reading has not been applied very often in hip hop studies, and hence my methodological choice expands the existing approaches within the field. As Krims (2000: 42) notes, (rap) music deserves and necessitates similar thorough analysis as any other socially constructed discursive element. Krims (2000: 18–24) outlines that previous critiques of musicological close readings have largely been based on lack of social and cultural context. Hence, it is also my aim to produce music analysis which is "a way of thinking of rap's social embeddedness" (Krims 2000: 14). Prior to the present study, few have dealt explicitly with the non-linguistic aspects of hip hop authenticity; however, ethnomusicologist Cheryl Keyes (2002: 124) for example notes that the usage of hip hop clothing and gestures aesthetically authenticate a connection to hip hop culture.

It was mentioned above that the object of discourse analysis is text. Bal (2009: 21) writes about the usefulness of the transdisciplinary concept of text in analyzing moving image, encouraging us to detach the concept somewhat from its linguistic and potentially limiting connotations in order to embrace its analytical and theoretical potential. Although she points to its controversial status in musicology, I have extended it to music and audio in my work, emphasizing, like Bal (2009: 21), the multimodality of meaning production:

> The advantage of speaking of 'visual texts' is that it reminds the analyst that lines, motifs, colours and surfaces, like words, contribute to the production of meaning; hence, that form and meaning cannot be disentangled. Neither texts nor images yield their meanings immediately. They are not transparent, so that images, like texts, require the labour of reading.

When reading a "text," we generally try to find out what it is about, its meaning. As popular music scholar Simon Frith (1996: 159) points out, we often watch

music videos in order to receive additional information about what the song and particularly the lyrics, the words, mean. However, from a social constructionist point of view, there is no inherent meaning in things. Thus it might seem illogical to some people unfamiliar with close reading that I claim to "read" authenticity, for example, in cultural works such as music videos in this study. Indeed, the intention is not to discover authenticity as some sort of pre-determined, fixed entity in the material that either is or is not there. Also, popular culture items do not have the same meaning for everyone consuming them; this may seem self-evident, yet we have an innate tendency to think that others see things and interpret things in the same way as we do. This is vitally connected to close reading; as Gordon Lynch (2005: 163) asserts: "[…]the meaning of a particular piece of popular culture may be interpreted in quite different ways depending on people's interests, experiences, and contexts," which is why a researcher should disclose his or her disciplinary and other background information in order to put their reading into context. In fact, there are two contexts that need to be highlighted when doing close reading: the context of the "text" being read, and the context of the researcher doing the reading. Only then does it become possible for others to access that particular reading. In my study, the close readings in chapter 5 rely on theoretical views about spirituality, atheism, and authenticity based on previous research done in religious studies, popular music studies and cultural musicology, and hip hop studies, reflecting my disciplinary background.

Additionally, in the vein of Bal's "frames" or framing (Bal 2002; 2009; see Richardson 2016b; see Pääkkölä 2016: 24–25), I rely on some carefully selected frames in doing close cultural analysis of the videos and of how they construct discourses on spirituality, atheism, and authenticity. I outline these discursive themes/frames in the beginning of each of subchapter: in subchapter 5.1. on Euro Crack's "Kräkkäkränkkä" video, the discourse on drugs frames the analysis; in subchapter 5.2. on Ameeba's "Vanhasielu," the discursive North and ideas about transmigration; and in subchapter 5.3. on Khid and RPK's "Luoti," notions of hip hop gangsterism and hypermasculinity. These frames were formulated based on the videos but also to some extent based on the artist interviews I conducted.

In practice, my close contextual reading of the three music videos and their sounds, images, and language meant hours of watching the videos. I conducted a detailed, interpretative, and descriptive analysis that draws from the videos themselves in addition to being informed by my other research materials and by the theoretical framework on authenticity, spirituality, and atheism. I then continued to analyze what kinds of discourses these videos can be interpreted to construct when looked at through the aforementioned frames. These additional frames allowed for a multifaceted reading which still remains connected to the research questions of this study, contributing to an informed cultural analysis

although not purporting to represent a sole or more accurate account of these videos than another type of analysis. Close reading a piece of music or video as a "text," albeit close, is still always *a* reading of it, and thus necessarily leaves out many possible interpretations (readings). A certain subjectivity of this methodological approach can be seen as a problem; however, the intention is not to find a "correct" reading of the object of analysis, but to present some of the cultural avenues available in it.

I have not focused too much on the artists' views in doing close reading of the videos also because they claimed they had not had a significant role in the outcome, and even seemed somewhat reluctant to discuss them. The people who shot the videos were typically friends or close acquaintances who were doing a favor for the rappers by agreeing to shoot the video. Because the compensation for their friends' work was somewhat or even considerably lower than for "regular" clients, the artists did not feel that they were necessarily in a position to project their vision, requests, or in other ways critique the style or editing of the video (Euro Crack i2015; Khid i2015). Although the artists often claimed having had little say in the outcome of the video, they have brought props with them to the shoot, thus clearly contributing to the artistic vision and outcome. The artists have also chosen to release them, and hence the audience will attach meanings to the artists and their music based on these videos, whether the artists like it or not. Naturally, I could have interviewed the videographers, too, but decided against it, as I was in the end mainly interested in the artists' expression. I hope that both the videographers and the readers of this study forgive me for limiting the analysis in this way due to issues of time and space management.

The three music videos and their close reading forms a quite specific, and different type of entity in comparison to the other material and analysis in this study. Someone might argue that this is a distraction from the central analytical framework, and confuses my views with those of the artists or the audience. Hopefully, however, I have been able to critically argue why I consider audiovisual analysis an important addition to this study, and have managed to conduct the readings in a way that allows the reader to see and hear parts of the discursive world available in the chosen videos. While my analysis is based on a handful of concepts and discursive elements and is thus selective, the purpose is not to account for all aspects in the videos in question, nor is that the purpose of discourse analysis or close reading more generally. The close reading should, however, aid the readers of this work to understand how and through what means (sonic, lyric, visual) the discourses of spirituality, atheism, and (rap) authenticity can manifest audiovisually in the Finnish rap underground.

2.3.2 Transcription conventions

A large part of this study relies on artist interviews, as I wanted the artists' voice to be heard through the material and analysis. While the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the extracts featured in this study have been edited slightly for the sake of readability: hesitations, stutters, and noises such as sighs, laughing, or coughing, or interjections such as "mm-hm," "like" ("niinku," "silleen"), or "yeah" ("joo") have usually been omitted and left unanalyzed unless they had a clear impact on the flow of the conversation or the arguments made. Omitted parts of two words or more are marked with [...] to acknowledge my impact on the end result. Pauses have mostly been left out, whereas cut-off words are marked with two dashes (--). As mentioned, my interest in terms of analysis has been on the content of the interviews more than on the interaction.

3 Historical background and conceptual framework

This chapter provides the larger historical and theoretical background for this study. Subchapter 3.1 offers a short historical and cultural overview of hip hop culture in the United States before moving onto the Finnish context where hip hop culture took root in the 1980s (sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2). Finnish hip hop history and styles have not been outlined in many sources prior to this study (see however Westinen 2014; Mikkonen 2004; Paleface 2011), hence characterizing this trajectory is necessary. In terms of stylistic aspects of Finnish rap (section 3.1.2), the focus is on the 2010s, as this is also the timeframe in this study.

Subchapter 3.2 delineates the conceptual framework of this study. The focus is on the two key themes of authenticity and contemporary Western worldviews, particularly "alternative" spirituality and atheism. Authenticity is a recurring element in virtually all of hip hop research, some of which is outlined below (in section 3.2.1). I provide a summary of previous research by placing the arguments regarding authenticity into two categories, cultural-historical and personal-experiential. Further, the current religious landscape, which I theorize through the concept of post-Christianity (section 3.2.2), is seen as a significant backdrop for my analysis. In relation to this, particularly new spirituality and atheism are theorized and connected with the present study.

3.1 Hip hop histories and legacies: from the Bronx to Finland

While a wide-ranging culture and lifestyle in and of itself, hip hop has also spawned a whole research field. The field of hip hop studies is interdisciplinary and today, rather expansive, research topics ranging from flow (e.g. Krims 2000; Kautny 2015) to sampling (e.g. Williams 2014), age (e.g. Forman 2014a; 2014b), race and racial authenticity (e.g. Hess 2005a; Ogbar 2007; Kwame Harrison 2008), masculinity (e.g. Jeffries 2011; Rose 2008), sexuality (e.g. Rose 1994; Pough et al. eds. 2007; Kehrer 2017), place and space (Forman 2002), and hip hop language (e.g. Pennycook 2007; E. Richardson 2006), just to name a few. This subchapter discusses some of this

previous research and aims to provide background information and context on the stylistic development of hip hop culture in the US and Finland, particularly concerning rap music's socially conscious and more underground styles. Such rap styles also characterize the music made by Ameeba, Julma Henri, RPK, and Khid, as will be seen in the analysis chapters.

Prior to mapping the Finnish hip hop scene, a brief overview of hip hop's cultural history is in order. The rationale for tracing this background can be justified with Elaine Richardson's (2006: 95–96) characterization of the relationship between US hip hop and subsequent adaptations in other settings around the world:

> Because commercial distribution of rap and Hiphop culture does not flow back into the U.S. as easily as it circulates out of the U.S., the circumstances of international contact prevent mutual influence, though there is some. However, each culture brings its own history and social practices to the sociocultural formations of Hiphop. […] Hiphop carries with it a paradigm, an aesthetic, and ideologies brought about through culture-specific sociopolitical and economic realities. Our languages and culture have been diffused in several ways via various media and technologies. People from around the globe are free to take up these expressions and transform them to fit their own realities; as Murray Forman argues, "the hood comes first." At the same time, the hood that came first was a Bronx hood.

The quotation above also highlights the discussion that hip hop studies scholars are engaging in globally and have done so for nearly two decades now, which is one of "multiple origins" (Westinen 2014: 34; Nitzsche 2013: 14). Most notably, the pioneering book *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* edited by Tony Mitchell (2001) critically addresses this question and began a larger interrogation of global hip hop's position vis-à-vis US hip hop. Hip hop culture has by now been indigenized in multiple places to the point where local hip hop histories may bear more weight on the current state and styles of hip hop in those places than hip hop's history in the US. Yet, although the question of hip hop's origins in the US is not something this work deals with directly, it needs to be addressed briefly as also the artists in this study have taken influences and continue to be influenced by US hip hop styles as well as other global music cultures. The question of origins and originality is an essential part of hip hop's authenticity discourse; the earliest forms of non-US hip hop were often imitations and adaptations of US hip hop music and expression, which then began to develop into fully localized forms (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003). Clear imitations of US hip hop are typically considered as "biting" (stealing) and thus inauthentic, yet historical understanding and application of the culture and style is highly valued.

The somewhat mythic history of hip hop, starting with its conception in the Bronx, NYC, has been told many times by several acknowledged authors (see for example the seminal works by Rose 1994; Keyes 2002; Forman 2002; Chang 2005), hence it is unnecessary to re-iterate it in detail here. However, some observations on stylistic influences are necessary in order to contextualize the analysis on aesthetics (the perceived sensory qualities of music), as discourses related to aesthetics are a significant part of this work. Cheryl Keyes (2002) and Robin Sylvan (2015 [2001]) among others trace the origins all the way to West Africa and African native forms of musical expression and vocal and rhythmic prowess, a legacy further developed as different poetic forms in African American music genres such as blues, jazz, funk, and rap, and verbal games, such as the dozens, signifying, or call-and-response (Gilroy 1993). Rhyming in particular, as Keyes (2002: 25) notes, has been an integral part of most verbal forms of African American culture. Rose, however, in her groundbreaking book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) underscores that rap is also an expression of urban black America and its socio-cultural and political conditions.

In canonized hip hop history, in addition to the African American oral tradition, the post-industrial economic structures and politics of large urban areas and cities such as New York, disproportionate representation of black and Latino minorities amidst poor neighborhoods, and socio-economic problems such as unemployment, drug abuse, and crime are depicted as having had a profound impact on the formation of hip hop culture in the 1970s and 1980s (Rose 1994; Keyes 2002; Forman 2002; Chang 2005). As youth channeled their frustration into creative forms of self-expression, the main elements which came together and formed an emerging hip hop culture were DJing (turntablism), rap (music), graffiti art, and dance (most notably breaking or breakdance). Following the stylistic example of radio disc jockeys and adopting the culture of Jamaican soundsystems and toasting, the hip hop DJs became the center of block parties and clubs and were soon accompanied by master of ceremonies, the MCs, who provided rhymed entertainment on the microphone which then developed into a style of music (Keyes 2002).

As Rose (1994) notes, hip hop music relies heavily on flow, rupture, and layering as well as innovative usage of technology. Hip hop music is largely based on loops, which function as "a format within which all aspects of the beat, from the drums to the vocals, can begin to take shape" (Schloss 2014 [2004]: 139). The aesthetic appreciation of sampling and versioning[24] function as a source of creative and innovative music making (Rose 1994), and they are often used also in constructing cultural-historical authenticity in hip hop (see section 3.2.1). As for example hip hop

[24] These practices are also part of the legacy of signifying, see Gates (1988); Keyes (2002); Rose (1994); Cox (2016: 30–32).

studies scholar Marcyliena Morgan (2009: 59–60) notes, rappers are also expected to "creatively play" with lyrical styles, language, and knowledge about popular culture, history, arts, politics, philosophy etc. Indeed, "rap was born as a form of necessary speech" (Bradley & DuBois 2010: xxxviii): the shock factor of violent lyrics, the wittyness of intricate rhymes, or simply the astounding number of words that fit into a rap song, are all part and parcel of what defines rap as an art form that millions around the world love to listen to.

Due to the socio-economic plight many hip hop artists have witnessed around them, critical views of society and capitalism have been a notable part of rap music since the early days of hip hop in the US, also in gangsta rap (Kelley 1996: 124; Forman 2002). Conscious rap, also sometimes termed knowledge rap, message rap, or political rap, describes social, political, and economic struggle and advocates knowledge, countercultural ideas, change, and social resistance. This subgenre of rap has been strongly connected to Afrocentricity, black power movement, and Nation of Islam as well as other political, religious, and spiritual movements particularly in its early stages in the 1980s and early 1990s (Rose 1994; Krims 2000; Forman 2002; Chang 2005; Ogbar 2007). Indeed, spirituality in its various forms has always been a strong part of hip hop music and its musical predecessors (e.g. Pinn 2015a [2003]). This is evident not only in the many explicit references to God in rap lyrics, or in the way in which rapping draws from oral traditions associated with the black church as call-and-response, but in how hip hop provides space for discussing existential questions in tandem with social justice issues (Poutiainen & Rantakallio 2016; Alim 2005). Rapping and singing in themselves can also be experienced as spiritual practice (Kirk-Duggan & Hall 2015 [2011]: 254). In many ways, rap and religion/spirituality are not opposite: they are inextricably bound.

Socially conscious rap and so-called reality rap which then evolved into gangsta rap have the same origins yet they parted ways in the 1990s, as defined by media studies scholar S. Craig Watkins (2005: 119):

> [R]eality rap encouraged MCs to be grittier, franker speaking, and even journalistic in their rhymes. […] The same traits that enhanced reality rap's commercial vitality – raw lyrics, aggressive style, and disdain for the establishment – also created space for a translation that was much coarser and less politically sophisticated. By the early 1990s a new crop of "reality rappers" directed their gaze toward the ghetto underworld of crime, crack, and street hustling.

This historical trajectory also demonstrates that hip hop has never been immune to controversial social issues, sexism, or the glorification of criminal life but rather, these topics raising moral questions have always been part of hip hop's complex artistic expressions (Rose 1994; Jeffries 2011). Today, in the wake of increasingly popular

far-right and alt-right movements, growing income inequality, and ecological concerns fueled by climate change, some of mainstream rap has retaken the fight for social change and justice with globally known US artists such as Jay-Z and T.I. promoting racial and socio-economic equality through their music and public appearances, and particularly women and queer folks as for example rapper Princess Nokia promoting intersectionally feminist ideas. In the US (and elsewhere), conscious themes have, however, historically been mostly restricted to the underground in hip hop apart from the late 1980s' and early 1990s' seminal groups such as Public Enemy or Boogie Down Productions or the criticism about racism and systemic inequality found in the music of gangsta rap artists such as N.W.A. or 2Pac.

Rappers who identify as "underground" may portray themselves as artistically superior to so-called mainstream rappers who in turn are portrayed to lack originality (Keyes 2002: 123). Both complex styles *and* philosophical content is perhaps something that is aesthetically valued in underground rap scenes more generally (Morgan 2009; DuVernay 2008; Oravcová 2013) compared to mainstream (pop) rap which may contain rhythmically complex flows but typically also lyrics that focus on sex, drugs, money, and violence, something that has not always been appreciated in the hip hop underground (DuVernay 2008; Oravcová 2013). The artists in this study can also be said to represent underground rap. For example Ameeba and RPK have mentioned being strongly influenced by the 1990s' Los Angeles underground rap and the "stylin'" (individual, innovative and unpredictable ways of rhyming and vocal delivery) which was common in the scene (DuVernay 2008), and have also stressed the importance of lyrical content.

Although the effectiveness of rap relies heavily on lyrics and language, what makes rap *music*, and what many fans and artists emphasize as even more important than the lyrics, are rap's beats and sounds which are typically built around bass and drum samples and loops. As Rose (1994: 67) argues, rap's sonic aspects are "not merely stylistic effects, they are aural manifestations of philosophical approaches to social environment" and "musical elements that reflect worldviews." Also flow, or how the rapper delivers his rhymes rhythmically, is a crucial part of rap. It is necessary to highlight the musicality of rap both in its vocal delivery, or the poetry of the rap lyrics, as well as its accompanying beats (Rantakallio 2018a). Although lack of space prevents me from providing a thorough analysis of the poetics of the case study's artists' rhymes and vocal delivery, I wish to acknowledge this aspect as central to rap aesthetics in general.

Hip hop scholars Tricia Rose (1994) and Elaine Richardson (2006) among many suggest that even when we are looking at non-US rappers, their aesthetics are drawing from originally black aesthetics, which makes it imperative to consider origins when researching hip hop. Cultural studies scholar Sina A. Nitzsche (2013: 14) accurately notes that multiple origins and cultures were present also in the Bronx

as Afro-Caribbean and Latino youth were part of the founding community. Today, speaking of hip hop culture only in terms of its US expressions is not only misrepresentative of the global hip hop culture but also underestimates the extent to which mainstream US artists now make use of musical influences from other countries; think of, for example, Kanye West sampling Hungarian rock music (in the song "New Slaves," 2013) or Canadian artist Drake's adaptations of dancehall and grime (e.g. Drake 2017). Indeed, the flow of cultural influences is perhaps more global and multidirectional than ever before thanks to processes of digitalization which have for example increased the availability of music via various streaming services exponentially. In many ways, the imagined global hip hop nation (Williams 2014: 11; Nitzsche 2013: 14) is more connected than ever.

While there are clear connections between Finnish and US hip hop's social consciousness and styles, for example, hip hop culture is also always localized. Murray Forman (2002) highlights that during its history, hip hop culture very quickly created connections between "space, place, and race." This development became particularly pronounced in the idea of "representin'," a crucial part of hip hop authenticity which entails "employment of numerous and often subtle communicative codes and cultural practices to define and articulate individual and posse identities, spatial locales grounded in the 'hood, and other aspects of individual and collective significance." (Forman 2002: 194.) This is closely connected to communication studies scholars Jannis Androutsopoulos and Arno Scholz's (2003: 476) observation that "one of the imperatives of rap discourse is to express local concerns and to reflect local social realities." This has resulted in a localized type of hip hop in terms of lyrics, musical influences, vernacular forms of expression and identities globally; for example in Finland, some mention also Finnish poetry as Finnish rap's predecessor and thus a localizing factor (Westinen 2014: 35; Paleface 2011: 21). Equally, cultural studies scholar Tony Mitchell noted already at the turn of the millennium that "rap and hip-hop have become just as 'rooted in the local'" (2001b: 10). Next, I trace the developments and particularities of the Finnish hip hop scene before theorizing hip hop's authenticity discourse.

3.1.1 Finnish hip hop history

Since the 1980s, hip hop culture has spread all over the world including Finland. Like Scandinavian countries or most of Europe in general (see Krogh & Stougaard Pedersen eds. 2008a; Nitzsche & Grünzweig eds. 2013), the Finnish rap music scene budded in the 1980s and developed into a fully formed local culture with multiple scenes by the late 1990s (Mikkonen 2004; Paleface 2011; Westinen 2014). The first generation(s) of Finland's hiphoppers have seen the culture grow and become

indigenized, and hip hop is currently one of the most if not *the* most popular music genre in Finland (see e.g. IFPI Finland nd.).

Despite the somewhat long history of academic hip hop research internationally and of Finnish hip hop as a music genre, there are still only two full-length higher level academic studies on Finnish hip hop: sociolinguist Elina Westinen's (2014) doctoral dissertation, and the first Finnish hip hop studies anthology compiled by the Finnish Hip Hop Research network, *Hiphop Suomessa: Puheenvuoroja tutkijoilta ja tekijöiltä* ("Hip Hop in Finland: Researchers' and Practitioners' Perspectives," Sykäri et al. eds. 2019), which combines scholars' and practitioners' articles. In addition to these works as well as several master's theses since early 2000s, there is currently only a moderate number of academic articles on Finnish rap across different fields of study (e.g. Kuivas 2003; Nieminen 2003; Suoranta 2005; Strand & Lahtinen 2006; Kärjä 2011; Tervo 2012; Sykäri 2014; Westinen 2012; 2016; Rantakallio 2018a).

The equally few popular publications on Finnish rap music and hip hop culture include for example the documentary *Kotipojat* ("Homeboys," Takkinen 2010) and the books *Riimi riimistä: Suomalaisen hiphopmusiikin nousu ja uho* ("Rhyme for rhyme: the rise and gall of Finnish hip hop music," Mikkonen 2004), *Rappiotaidetta – Suomiräpin tekijät* ("Degenerate art – Finnish rap's practitioners," Paleface 2011), *Hyvä verse. Suomiräpin naiset* ("Nice verse. The women of Finnish rap," Strand 2019), *Kolmetoista kertaa kovempi. Räppärin käsikirja* ("13 times harder. Rapper's handbook," Paleface & Salminen 2019) and *Lainaan enkä palauta: Suomalainen rap ja hiphop 1983–2018* ("I'll borrow and won't return: Finnish rap and hip hop 1983–2018," Similä & Hietaneva forthcoming 2020).

A handful of Finnish scholars today research Finnish rap music. Elina Westinen's (2014) pioneering doctoral dissertation addressed authenticity of three Finnish male rap artists, Cheek, Pyhimys, and Stepa, from the point of view of polycentricity and multiscalarity, while her current research focuses on Finnish rappers of color and questions of (non)belonging (Westinen 2016; 2018; 2019). Sociolinguist Dragana Cvetanovic (2010; 2014) in her research discusses nationalism, ethnicity, and politics of Finnish and Balkan rap. Folklorist Venla Sykäri (e.g. Sykäri 2014; 2019) has worked extensively on freestyle rap in Finland. In addition to these pioneers, there are scholars in Finland working on rap or hip hop culture from other angles within several interdisciplinary fields.

Meanwhile, an edited volume on hip hop in the Scandinavian countries was published already in 2008 (Krogh & Stougaard Pedersen eds. 2008a), which deals with hip hop from "glocal" perspectives while tracing the historical and socio-cultural developments of hip hop scenes in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. In addition, many hip hop cultures around Europe were addressed in a volume edited by cultural studies scholars Sina A. Nitzsche and Walter Grünzweig (2013). Neither

of these volumes, however, discuss hip hop in Finland. In light of this rather scarce documentation, the Finnish hip hop scene and its history merit another overview.

A fruitful analytical way of thinking about the development of Finnish hip hop and rap is to consider it as a series of waves, as also Westinen does in her doctoral dissertation (2014); the metaphor captures the visible mainstream trends as well as the more underground "currents" of the culture. I have also added approximate years of these stages to my analysis. While Westinen (2014) ends her analysis in the third wave, I argue below that Finnish hip hop has by now moved into its fourth wave, characterized particularly by the rise of female rappers.

The first wave (ca. 1983–1999) of artists rapping in Finnish in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as Raptori, Pääkköset, Bat & Ryyd, and MC Nikke T, was mostly labeled as humour rap (Mikkonen 2004; Kärjä 2011; Paleface 2011). Also some individual rap songs were made by other artists following this trend, such as "Suomi on Euroopan kallein maa" ("Finland is Europe's most expensive country," 1989) by the rock group Kolera. Journalists Heikki Hilamaa and Seppo Varjus (2004: 196) suggest that in the early days of Finnish hip hop culture in the late 1980s the cultural distance between "black culture" and Finnish culture was too vast, thus humor was used to alleviate this. Humor has been a vital part of rap music in general and of Finnish music tradition in particular (Kärjä 2011; Paleface 2011: 38). Besides humorous lyrics, in the beginning Finnish rap typically relied on perfect rhymes (identical rhyming syllable) and sing-songy, nursery rhyme style of flow (see e.g. "Oi Beibi," "Oh baby," Raptori 1990). Several have accused these pioneers of ruining Finnish rap with their styles, traumatizing a whole generation of Finnish hip hop heads and making it impossible to be a credible rapper rapping in Finnish for several years onwards (Mikkonen 2004: 50; Takkinen 2010; Paleface 2011: 52; cf. also Strand & Lahtinen 2006: 153), despite the fact that they had a real influence on many rappers who came to the scene later (Paleface 2011). Raptori and Pääkköset were not always considered as rap groups (Luoto 2002), and particularly Raptori rather consistently denied making rap music (Mikkonen 2004; Lindfors 2007). This seems to suggest that focusing too much on humor, irony, or parody in music making are sometimes considered as signs of dishonesty; several seemingly felt that rap music should be made seriously in order to merit the label of authenticity and credibility, and not tongue-in-cheek.

Yet, Finnish rappers who later utilized humor have not been accused of setting back the entire genre: in fact, particularly MC Taakibörsta, active since the 2000s, is one of the most popular underground rap groups and is entirely based on licentious lyrics and characters (Mikkonen 2004: 56, 72). This is likely due to their established status in the hip hop scene (for example Davo as an MC and club organizer, Paleface 2011: 74) already prior to their music making endeavors, in other words they were seen as knowledgeable insiders. In comparison, Raptori seemingly never had any clear connection to the Finnish hip hop community, and were perceived as inauthentic,

which perhaps illustrates that being "in" the scene and actively participating in creating it can be a crucial criterion for being perceived authentic (cf. J.P. Williams 2006).

Generally speaking, most of these humor rappers were not involved in the Finnish hip hop subculture which took root around 1983–1984 after popular cultural influences featuring hip hop elements, such as the movies *Beat Street* (1984) and *Wildstyle* (1983), reached Finnish teenagers (Paleface 2011; Sykäri et al. 2019). During these early days, many other Finnish rappers who were part of the local hip hop subculture along with DJs, graffiti artists, and breakdancers, performed in English, following the US example. Most notable groups were The Master Brothers, Definite Three (later Definite Four), and Damn the Band (Paleface 2011: 25–26; Westinen 2014: 37). Rapping in a foreign language was not always easy, yet the lack of serious examples of rapping in Finnish language didn't make things much easier, either. Some of the earlier rap made in Finnish was considered to imitate its American counterpart through humorous translations of rap clichés (Paleface 2011: 35) which suggests that it was not considered "real" hip hop nor representative of the artists' own (Finnish) culture. Many considered the stigma caused by the first wave humor rappers to be an insurmountable obstacle for rapping in Finnish if wishing to be taken seriously. While the Finnish hip hop underground was small but alive in the 1990s, practitioners such as Ceebrolistics and Nuera making music in Finnish and others organizing clubs and jams made sure not be associated with humor rappers (Paleface 2011: 40–49; see also Mikkonen 2004: 55–56).

The second wave (ca. 1999–2008) of Finnish rap was jumpstarted by Fintelligens, the first rap group to reach mainstream success in Finnish language after the early nineties' humor groups, as they released their debut album *Renesanssi* ("Renaissance") in 2000 (e.g. Mikkonen 2004). Rap in Finnish now became a more indigenized and popular form of music in Finland.[25] This aided artists in self-expression and helped the audience to understand and relate to the lyrics as they now dealt with more local topics. (Mikkonen 2004; Paleface 2011; Takkinen 2010.) By the end of the 1990s, more complex rhyming, and particularly vowel based imperfect rhymes (assonance) became frequent (Rantakallio 2018a). Yet, notable exceptions

[25] Similar development from English to local language and dialect use in rap was visible in Scandinavia. In Norway, much like in Finland, Norwegian language took over English in rap mid-to-late 90s (Knudsen 2008: 63) and also Sweden had a prominent English language scene in the beginning whereas in Denmark rappers used Danish from the start (Krogh & Stougaard Pedersen 2008b: 13). In all four of these Nordic countries, hip hop culture started spreading first in the forms of breaking and graffiti in the early 1980s (Krogh & Stougaard Pedersen 2008b: 13; Mikkonen 2004; see also Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998). Also in Iceland, the first wave of rap artists rapped in English (Chapman nd.), and like Icelandic in Iceland, gradually Finnish language became the preferred and thus dominant language of rappers and their audience in Finland.

to this new wave of Finnish rap were artists rapping in English, such as Paleface, the Finland-Swedish rapper Redrama, and the dance music group Bomfunk MC's with a vocalist (Raymond Ebanks) rapping in English, whose song "Freestyler" (1999) also became an international hit. Later in the 2010s rapping also in minority languages became a normal part of the Finnish hip hop scene; Finland-Swedish artists such as Qruu (cf. Brusila 2015: 16) or JAG rap in Swedish, and Sámi artists such as Amoc or Áilu Valle rap in different Sámi languages (Inari Sámi and Northern Sámi respectively). Some minority rappers have argued that rapping in your mother tongue feels more natural (Brusila 2015: 16) and sometimes also aims at preserving endangered languages (Leppänen & Pietikäinen 2010; Savusalo 2014). Yet the second wave of Finnish rap did not yet see such diversification in the hip hop scene despite the official minority status of Swedish and Sámi speakers in Finland.

Among the rappers who used Finnish, Fintelligens has typically been considered as the first "real" rap group as they did not aim to make parody rap like the first acts rapping in Finnish in the late 1980s. Yet Fintelligens, too, received criticism about their pronunciation, or "Finglish," as it did not follow the conventional intonation of Finnish language (Takkinen 2010; Paleface 2011: 50–52). Thus, it appears that their flow was not considered natural. More and more artists (for example Tulenkantajat, Kemmuru) began to use local dialects which in Finnish resulted in the term "murreräppi" (dialect rap). The Finnish rap scene was now trying to find its form and many artists, particularly the more pop-oriented mainstream ones such as Fintelligens or Kapasiteettiyksikkö, and the more "artsy" underground rappers, for example Ceebrolistics, were engaged in verbal battles both on- and off-record[26] about what hip hop is or isn't (Rantakallio 2018a). Religion also became a more visible theme when the underground rapper Ruudolf released his debut solo album with overt Christian themes, *Doupeimmat Jumala seivaa* ("God saves the dopest," 2004). The rap scene also hosted a notable female presence, which transpired into the Femcees Finland collective that remained active during the first half of the noughties (Mikkonen 2004: 115–117).

During the 1990s, local rap scenes all over the world had solidified hip hop as global culture (Mitchell ed. 2001; Nitzsche 2013). US rap had already been around long enough for people to not only adopt it but to mold and indigenize it; this usually happened when one or two local artists reached mainstream popularity (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003: 464). This same development took place in

[26] A few "diss songs" worth mentioning from this era are for example "Hiphopskeidaa" by RoopeK and Didier (2000) and "Sori" by Fintelligens (2002). Dissing can be defined as "*dis*respecting [...] someone else's attributes while praising one's own" (Keyes 2002: 137; emphasis in original). On verbal battling in hip hop see for example Morgan (2009); Sykäri (2014).

Finland along with the mainstream success of Fintelligens and socially conscious artist Paleface for example at the turn of the millennium. It seems that the question of authenticity (re)surfaced with the arrival of Fintelligens and socially conscious artists who received a fair amount of success, raising questions about their true agenda vs. seeking credibility and success with conscious critical content (Kuivas 2003: 24). Starting from this second wave, more artists now also began to mix rap with various other genres of music, such as dub, world music, folk etc. (e.g. Giant Robot, Don Johnson Big Band, Asa).

By the early 2000s, Finnish rap had become a veritable scene of its own. While dozens of artists made their music all over Finland, the overheating of the market with the unprecedented record sales and popularity of Pikku G ("Lil' G"), a teen rapper with a shortlived career (Mikkonen 2004), ended up causing somewhat of a hiatus. Many artists took a break from rap while focusing on other projects and some stopped rapping altogether until making a comeback in the 2010s (e.g. Ceebrolistics, Sere).

The third wave (ca. 2008–2018) was characterized for the most part by Cheek's unparalleled mainstream success and subsequent regained popularity of mainstream Finnish hip hop. After a quieter period in the mid-2000s with few to no releases with mainstream success, Finnish rap's third wave began with Cheek's hit song "Liekeissä" ("Lit") in 2008. Within a few years, Cheek's pop rap became the highest selling music in Finland. Particularly the high visibility of such artists as Cheek, Elastinen, and Mikael Gabriel was due to them featuring in different seasons of the popular *Vain Elämää* ("Just life") TV-show along with a handful of Finnish pop and rock stars, including also arena concerts and record releases based on the format. Additionally, for the first time in history, a Finnish solo artist sold out the Helsinki Stadium twice in a row when Cheek performed there in August 2014.

At the top of its third wave of mainstream popularity, Finnish rap became more versatile than ever. In Finland, it was also now acknowledged widely as a genre of its own instead of being categorized under rock music like in the past (cf. Saaristo, ed. 2003; Lahtinen & Lehtimäki, eds. 2006; also Takkinen's 2010 documentary is part of *Rock Suomi* series). There is now also a handful of newer generation Finnish rappers, such as B.W.A, The View, and Jesse Markin (The Megaphone State) who rap mainly or solely in English. The third wave also saw the appearance of the dubious term "immigrant rap" which has been used to racialize non-white rappers while erasing stylistic differences between artists who are placed in that category.[27]

[27] The racist connotations of the term become evident even when making a superficial comparison of Finnish media articles regarding white rapper Mäkki, who is Estonian by background, and non-white rappers who have either moved to Finland as children or were born here. To my knowledge, Mäkki has never been categorized as an "immigrant rapper."

All the while, authenticity has been and continues to be a central theme in Finnish rap music as well. For example Cheek largely built his public image around the notion, stating that he aims to make music where everything he utters is "true" and "real" (Westinen 2014: 288).

I argue that Finnish hip hop is currently experiencing its **fourth wave** (ca. 2018–), which is characterized by the pop mainstream success of a handful of artists, notably JVG, Elastinen, and Mikael Gabriel. Cheek, who is now also an investor in a night club in Helsinki (Glad 2017), retired in 2018, which can be seen as an end of an era. Other features demarcating the transition phase into the fourth wave include a new surge of women rap artists and feminism, comeback shows by groups and artists established in the early 2000s, stronger differentiation between different subgenres and styles of rap, and the mixing of rap and other forms of art. The fourth wave is breaking previously prevalent ideas about hip hop's performance conventions, masculinity, age, and genre boundaries. For the first time, the scene features also openly Muslim rappers, such as Pijall, Kingfish, and Hassan Maikal. Not all artists are confining themselves to rap music, either. Some prominent examples of this mixing are rap label PME Records hosting also pop artists in its roster, rapper Paperi T's "post-rap" (see album *Malarian pelko*, "Fear of malaria," 2015) which has included a concert hall tour and a poem book publication (*Post Alfa*, 2016) challenging hegemonic ideas about hip hop masculinity. For example Mikael Gabriel, Gracias, Paleface, and Julma Henri have expanded to acting roles in movies. Additionally, the acting career and current electronic/noise-influenced music releases as Exploited Body by Noah Kin, who was previously known as a solo rap artist, or the dancers turned rappers of the duo Pimeä Hedelmä aptly characterizes the dynamics of current Finnish hip hop culture and movement between genres and art forms. While more and more artists of color and female artists emerge, also issues of racism and sexism within the Finnish hip hop scene are debated (Mielonen 2018; Hätinen 2017; Räty 2017).

However, I consider the strongest particularity of this fourth wave to be the rise of a prominent number of women rappers with different styles ranging from boom bap to trap. Many feature explicitly feminist content in their music commenting on non-heterosexual sexuality, sexual harassment, power structures, and millennial life more generally, sometimes in a humorous tone. Artists in this distinctly feminist style include for example Adikia, Mon-sala, Pimeä Hedelmä, SOFA, and Yeboyah. The number of women artists has multiplied in the late 2010s in Finland, yet unfortunately none have (yet) received the kind of success and recognition as male artists. Nevertheless, the show called D.R.E.A.M.G.I.R.L.S. featuring the female DJ duo Dream and rappers Adikia, Mon-sala, F, Nisa, B.W.A, Sofa, and Yeboyah attracted an arena sized crowd of roughly 15 000 spectators at Flow Festival in 2018, which suggests that a new revolutionary era with prominent female rappers is on its way.

Additionally, the new visibility of age and different generations of artists is worth mentioning as the now middle-age pioneers are doing comeback or reunion concerts, or rather, tours, at least partially due to nostalgia. This, of course, is parallel to the recent trend in the US where veteran MCs and cliques popular in the 1990s, such as Public Enemy or Bad Boy Records' artists, are doing reunion tours. In Finland, these include seminal groups from early 2000s' second wave such as Ritarikunta, MC Taakibörsta, Kemmuru, and Ceebrolistics.

Westinen (2014) traces the history and regional developments of Finnish rap and its styles quite thoroughly, hence in the rest of this subchapter, I focus on some aspects of these developments from the point of view of subgenres and social consciousness. The depictions below are meant to give an indication of some of the major stylistic trends in current Finnish rap, and thus do not represent the entire genre and its versatility.

3.1.2 Stylistic differences in Finnish rap music

While there are both similarities and differences between rappers hailing from different parts of Finland, accounting for Finland's rap scene in terms of larger regional styles[28] would be rather futile as there is little general consensus of such similarities. Westinen (2014) outlines some characteristics, such as the heavy concentration of artists into larger cities such as Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä, Oulu, and particularly Helsinki. As Westinen (2014: 54) notes, such development is not out of the ordinary in a sparsely populated country such as Finland where most livelihood opportunities lie in the larger cities; the previously largely agrarian society has only during the past several decades developed into an industrialized and technology-driven service society (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 59), with some of the worlds highest ratings in terms of the quality of education and social welfare, social equality, and freedom of expression.[29] Some rappers emphasize their rural or small-town origins in their raps, as can be detected for example in the music of Stepa, Jodarok, or Gettomasa, for example.

[28] In the US, terms denoting perceived similarities between artists who hail from the same region are sometimes used, for example Dirty South, West Coast, East Coast. It is debatable whether such categorizations are helpful in accounting for stylistic traits of artists. See particularly Hess (ed. 2010) for an overview of regional styles in the US.

[29] Yet, many perceive that the political decisions cutting funding from these very institutions, increased challenges to freedom of press, as well as harsh treatment of asylum seekers and increasing visibility of right-wing political actors and opinions have severely damaged the idea (and reality) of Finland as an open and democratic welfare society in the 2010s.

Perhaps already evident above in the history of Finnish hip hop, the mainstream pop rap or trap and underground rap appear as slightly different rap scenes. Like Westinen (2014), I consider that some stylistic similarities between artists can be detected on some rap labels: for example the heavily trap influenced artists on Tasoi Records, the gritty urban realism of many 3rd Rail Music artists, Lihamyrsky Records's humorous and soulful rap, the pop/party oriented rap of Rähinä Records, the artists of small Rutilus Records with for example feminist and LGBTQIA+ themes, and the young trap/emo rap/R&B influenced artists of Skorpioni. The two larger labels, Monsp Records and PME Records, feature a versatile set of artists who arguably represent rather independent stylistic approaches. The latter hosts also pop artists such as Alma and has a distribution contract with Warner Music, whereas the former was bought by Warner. Of course, some Finnish rap artists are also unsigned (e.g. Ameeba) or signed on major labels, such as Universal or Warner (e.g. Mikael Gabriel). In addition to other smaller records labels, there are various other actors which organize events, and distribute and promote rap music or sometimes also "hip hop adjacent" music such as R&B or electronic pop (e.g. Överdog, Cocoa). The blurring of roles between record labels, distributors and marketing/consultancy agencies in Finland is symptomatic of the changes taking place in global music industry at large in 2010s.

Conscious rap has been a prominent genre in Finland and decidedly leftist in its political content (cf. also Westinen 2014: 49). Musically, this content has been paired with all types of sounds, as can be heard in the somewhat funkier music of rapper Jontti or the grittier sounds of Julma Henri. Rapper and activist Paleface has combined this content with a variety of musical influences drawing from agit prop to folk music. Some notable rappers, including Paleface, Julma Henri, and Tommy Lindgren for example, have publicly supported for example the Left Alliance and Amnesty, and have also performed in political rallies for the leftist party. In contrast, Cheek has enjoyed open support from notable politicians of The Coalition party, which is economically right-wing (Rantakallio 2018a). While the chart-topping rappers have achieved a financially stable position, some Finnish underground rap artists are struggling to make ends meet, and some are also openly political in their views, particularly as they condemn the increasing income gap between those more well-off and those on the bottom of societal food chain. "Syrjäytymisräppi" ("destitution rap"), or rap depicting particularly young white males' social struggle with unemployment, illness, and substance abuse (see for example the name and music of Julma Henri & Syrjäytyneet, "Julma Henri and the Destitutes") is according to journalists Ville Similä and Panu Hietaneva (2017) a style of conscious rap that is indigenous to Finland in the sense that similar style does not exist elsewhere.

Also other "conscious" topics, such as racism in its multiple forms, has been addressed in lyrics of The Megaphone State for example. Sexism has been tackled

by Finnish female rappers, for example by Mariska already in the early 2000s on her debut album *Toisin Sanoen* ("In other words," 2002), and during the past two or three years by several female artists mentioned above. Also ecological concerns have been present in Finnish rap. Perhaps the earliest example is "Talaskangas rap" (1989), a song expressing ecological concerns by Artistit avohakkuita vastaan ("Artists against clearcutting") which was an ensemble made of rock artists. Nowadays Asa, Paleface, Ameeba, and Áilu Valle among others rap about their ecological concerns (Välimäki 2019).

In terms of sounds and beats, the musical resemblance of some of Finnish rap to its US counterpart is evident: heavy bass backed with drum machines, and sometimes auto-tuned, pitched down or otherwise heavily altered vocals. The same global trends, often emanating from the US, in recent years particularly the Southern US rap styles such as trap, have also transpired heavily to Finnish rap sounds, as can be seen in the works of artists such as Kube (Monsp Records), Diison, and Kingfish (both Tasoi Records), or Slim Mill (unsigned) for example. Some slang in the Finnish lyrics is also borrowed from trendy US artists.

The American style of gangsta rap has generally been a decidedly absent form of rap in Finland as many have considered it as ill-suited to the Finnish scene (Nieminen 2003), and perhaps as a result of this, a new, rather successful Finnish parody of the gangsta rap genre was born (e.g. KC/MC Mafia, DJ Kridlokk, Eevil Stöö). Finnish "gangsta" rap – if we can even detect such as genre – is soundwise reminiscent of US gangsta rap and particularly so-called Memphis rap, but the content of this Finnish variant is quite clean as it rarely contains misogynist or violent lyrics; instead, the parodic lyrics narrate stories about pathetic small-time thieves and weed smokers. Also in American gangsta rap, there is exaggeration and tongue-in-cheek rhetorics. Historically, US gangsta rap has in many ways been "reality rap" (Krims 2000: 70–71) which focuses on narrating violence, gangbanging, drug dealing, and other realities of poor, predominantly black and brown urban neighborhoods through a heteronormative and aggressively hypermasculine lense. While imitations of such aesthetics are certainly visible in Finnish rap, the conditions depicted in the gangsta rap subgenre are simply not social reality in Finland. Finnish artists perceive obvious social and cultural differences, including racial demographics (Finland is a relatively "white" country ethnically), between the kind of music Finnish rappers in general are making and the US style of gangsta rap. An exception worth mentioning however, is Mercedes Bentso with her gritty reality rap: she uses convicted felons and former narcotics users in her videos, and depicts physical and substance abuse among other topics in her lyrics.

In the US, gangsta rap is typically contrasted with conscious rap due to its often violent content (Rabaka 2012: 144). In Finland, mainstream pop rap is often depicted as the opposite of conscious rap. Finnish pop rap could be characterized as party

music which features sounds and topics familiar from mainstream pop and electronic dance music; this style includes for example artists JVG, the first singles of Sini Sabotage, and Redrama's more recent releases (e.g. the album *Reflection,* 2014). Also some graphic depictions of sexual encounters and drug use that have been common in US mainstream rap are present in Finnish mainstream rap, although to a lesser extent than in the US. Sexist and sexual imagery has arguably become more prevalent in Finnish rap in the late 2010s.[30]

Besides some stylistic borrowing, the cultural values of honesty and authenticity and the discourse on "realness" have seemingly been adopted and adapted to Finnish hip hop from US hip hop, although in a localized way (see Westinen 2014). Accordingly, I position myself within the "new school of hip hop theorists" and their view of hip hop as "culturally mobile" (Bennett 2004: 177), hence also hip hop authenticity is seen in this study as locally (re-)constructed in and through various discourses and to an extent, but not entirely, independent from the US scene. In the following subchapter, I discuss some studies on hip hop authenticity while developing a two-fold categorization for the arguments regarding authenticity in hip hop.

3.2 Theoretical concepts and background

In this subchapter, I outline the theoretical framework used in this study. The first section (3.2.1) traces the main aspects of authenticity discourse in hip hop, offering a binary theoretical model of cultural-historical and personal-experiential authenticity. The second section (3.2.2) characterizes new spirituality, atheism, and their connections to recent cultural and societal shifts in the West, namely the post-Christian age.

3.2.1 Authenticity in hip hop: cultural-historical and personal-experiential arguments

While the discussion around authenticity is a central facet of hip hop culture, authenticity more generally has fascinated popular music scholars for decades, the topics extending from live performance (e.g. Shuker 2008) to commercialism (e.g. Moore 2002; Forman, 2002), subcultures (e.g. Thornton 1995; Hebdige 1979), authorship (e.g. Shuker 2008), and technology (e.g. Katz 2004; Marshall 2001),

[30] This is visible for example in the pop rap duo JVG's video with the pop singer Anna Abreu for the song "Huominen on huomenna" where Abreu is seen in a bathing suit and the camera frequently focuses on her derriere ("Tomorrow is tomorrow," JVG & Anna Abreu 2014). The female behind is a body part which has been highly sexualized in hip hop (and more recently also in pop) imagery (e.g. Rose 1994: 167–168).

among others. Research has also discussed authenticity's relationship with issues such as self-lived experience, race, and the moral and artistic value of music (e.g. Frith 2007: 318–325; Barker & Taylor 2007). Cultural and media studies scholar P. David Marshall (2001: 150) goes as far as claiming that the discourse around authenticity is the most central characteristic defining all major popular music transformations of the twentieth century, a crucial issue being the performer's authenticity. Equally, popular music scholar Keir Keightley (2001: 131) states that authenticity has been "a core value of Western society for centuries." Popular music and popular culture, including hip hop, is constantly evaluated by its consumers, and authenticity is one critical value that is often sought after and appreciated (e.g. Frith 1996; Barker & Taylor 2007). Below I outline some central observations regarding authenticity in popular music that are relevant for this study, and develop a theoretical framework for analyzing hip hop's authenticity arguments.

Popular music scholars Hans Weisethaunet and Ulf Lindberg (2010: 465) state that authenticity is always a "construction of a certain relationship between work and author." This includes a moral aspect when authenticity becomes attached to the idea of truthfulness – which can mean various things depending on the context (Weisethaunet & Lindberg 2010: 470). One of its antitheses is "artificiality" (Weisethaunet & Lindberg 2010: 473; cf. Anttonen 2017a), but for example the idea of a "performance persona" (Auslander 2004), the constructedness of identities and performances which is a central analytical concept used also in the present study, complicates this notion. Performance and media studies scholar Philip Auslander (2004: 6) notes, borrowing from performance studies scholar Richard Schechner, that "performance is always a matter of the performer's not being himself but also not not being himself," in other words that there is a real person behind the obviously constructed performance. Auslander (2004: 9) further argues that a performance persona is consistent in the sense that it does not change into another character between songs, for instance, despite being malleable and accommodating to the evolution of an artist's expression. As popular music scholar Rupert Till (2010: 51) also notes, this element of fantasy and play is part and parcel of artistry that makes use of the authenticity idea:

> The star attempts to convince the audience that what they are performing is their own authentic emotions and their 'true' self, while actually enhancing, exaggerating, inventing or selectively revealing material within this presentation to make it interesting to the public. This is not so much deceit as story telling, it is theatre […].

Till's argument resonates strongly with Auslander's (2004: 9) observation that the audience derives pleasure out of consuming these personae. At the same time,

audience yearns to experience a seemingly genuine connection with artists. Indeed, the audience in many ways determines the discourse around authenticity. Musicologist Allan Moore (2002) elaborates that authenticity is culturally constructed and ascribed by the audience; it can be ascribed to the artist's original, "unmediated" expression resulting in successful communication (first person authenticity), when the performer successfully offers a chance for identification and/or belonging as though the music was conveying the listener's own story (second person authenticity), or when a performer appropriates and thus authenticates style and ideas of the genre (third person authenticity). As journalists Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor (2007: 334) note, discursive ideas about authenticity in music "affect the listener, and […] affect the performers themselves. The two cannot be completely disentangled, because part of most artists' motivation is based on the perceptions and approval of the audience." This issue is discussed further in chapter 6. Popular music scholar Salli Anttonen (2017a) also lists the perceived inauthenticity of the audience as one aspect of the authenticity discourse, in other words the credibility of the artist as regards their listeners. For instance, being the idol of adolescent girls is generally considered harmful for an artist's credibility. In the Finnish rap scene, similar discussion has arisen particularly regarding Cheek's and Mikael Gabriel's fan base.

Authenticity is also genre specific to some extent, which is related to genre rules and genre categorization (Negus 1995: 334; Frith 1996; 91–95; Fetterley 2007: 113–114; Anttonen 2017a: 60–61; cf. Auslander 2004: 10). In rock or pop music, imitating another artist or directly borrowing can be considered stealing and thus inauthentic (Anttonen 2017a). In hip hop and in most forms of afrodiasporic music cultures, however, borrowing, sampling, and versioning are appreciated and somewhat of a standard (Rose 1994; Williams 2014). They are often utilized to pay homage and to serve as evidence that the person is well aware of and appreciates the genre's history. However, this does not mean that the common "romantic ideal of the artist as a creative genius who possesses originality" (Anttonen 2016: 43) would be absent in hip hop, as will also be seen in this study. I thus argue that although there are many similarities between various popular music genres, hip hop's authenticity discourse has unique traits which I discuss next.

Although such expressions related to hip hop authenticity as "realness," "true to the game," "fake," "sell-out," "real recognize real," and "keeping it real" are without a doubt something most hip hop fans and artists know and many try to live up to, their meaning is interpreted in various ways, especially as hip hop is now a global phenomenon. Although fully concurring with Kembew McLeod (1999: 139) in that authenticity's meaning "changes depending on the context in which it is invoked" (see also Westinen 2014; cf. Anttonen 2017a: 60–61), I argue that it is possible to develop categories that are broad enough to accommodate most if not all instances where hip hop authenticity is evoked, but which are still sufficiently confined to

function as part of an analytic framework. It appears that most arguments on authenticity fall within two categories which relate either to the the hip hop community and its culture and history or the individual practitioners and their individual expression.

These two categories become visible for example in the following quotations about hip hop music and popular music subcultures. Hip hop scholar Mickey Hess (2005a: 374) succinctly notes that "[h]ip-hop realness, then, is conveyed when an artist performs as a unique individual while maintaining a connection with the original culture of hip-hop." Sociologist Sarah Thornton (1995: 30) states that "[a]rtistic authenticity is anchored by the performing author in so far as s/he is assumed to be the unique origin of the sound, while subcultural authenticity is grounded in the performer in so far as s/he represents the community." Laura Speers (2014: 12) discusses a tension or difference between what she terms rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity: "Hip hop authenticity then refers to how practitioners have to follow certain tropes, practices and rules based on the culture's history to gain acceptance by the collective, and yet, on the other hand, be highly individual and original, which can be understood as rapper authenticity."

Based on previous research and the data gathered for the present study, I have formulated a two-fold division of the main categories under which most hip hop authenticity claims fall under: 1) **cultural-historical** and 2) **personal-experiential** (see **Table 1**). This is somewhat similar to Speers' (2014) idea mentioned above. Although my focus here is on hip hop music, there are similarities regarding for example DJing (e.g. Schloss 2014 [2004]; Katz 2012: 233–234) and hip hop dance (e.g. Koutsougera 2012). The first category contains the social and cultural aspects of hip hop authenticity whereas the second category contains aspects revolving around the individual practitioner. The context within which the authenticity discourse is evoked then determines under which category the argument falls, or "what is judged when authenticity is evaluated" (Anttonen 2017a: 38). As it would be impossible to list all types of arguments that pertain to these broad categories, I am discussing only some of most commonly recurring ones below.

Table 1. A summary of arguments regarding hip hop authenticity.

Cultural-historical	Personal-experiential
knowledge of hip hop history/culture	personal experience
connection with (local) community	original individual expression
continuity between performer and tradition	artistic integrity
	truthfulness

Cultural-historical authenticity

This first category encompasses arguments which refer to hip hop's social, cultural, and historical roots and traits. An artist may authenticate themselves as part of the genre's community, history and musical style, for example by borrowing from US hip hop to local hip hop expressions like the Finnish rapper Cheek claims to do with his party rap (Westinen 2014: 233–237). This category is very similar to Moore's (2002) third person authenticity. Arguments about authenticity are constructed from the point of view of the hip hop community, its culture, and social realities.

In this category of cultural-historical arguments about authenticity, the object of assessment may be an individual but what is being evaluated has to do with their connection with hip hop culture and its socio-cultural and historical surroundings. Arguments regarding the individual alone fall under the second category of personal-experiential authenticity (see below). Thus, for example, the age- and experience-based authenticity argument which the rappers in this study apply (see subchapter 6.2) can fall under one or both categories, depending on whether the argument is evoked in relation to the artist's accumulated knowledge of the culture (cultural-historical category) or the artist's individual lived experience (personal-experiential category). Similarly, race-related narratives can be used to authenticate the artist's personal experiences in a racist society, or their membership in a largely non-white hip hop community.

This category of cultural-historical authenticity arguments is strongly connected to the idea of (hip hop) community. Forman (2002: xviii) explains the spatial aspect of hip hop community, arguing that particularly the centrality of the "hood" is part of this type of hip hop authenticity. Whereas the ghetto has been associated with negative cultural ideas – and, I would add, has specific class and race connotations not applicable to the Finnish context as such – "the 'hood offers a new terminology and discursive frame that can simultaneously address conditions in all 'hoods' everywhere, to individuated places, or to particular sites of significance" (Forman 2002: 65). This becomes all the more apparent in the idea of "representin'" mentioned already earlier, in other words the expectation that rappers "maintain connections to the 'hood and to 'keep it real' thematically, rapping about situations, scenes, and sites that comprise the lived experience of the 'hood" (Forman 2002: 180). Marcyliena Morgan (2009: 72) also highlights that representing does not refer merely to speaking about and identifying with a place, but about passing cultural knowledge and insights about "people, and events when an interaction is framed around important referential symbols and context." For example, in the formational years of hip hop and several thereafter, US rappers hailing from the East Coast were adamant in defending the authenticity of rap's urban roots and historical origins in New York City, whereas the West Coast gangsta rap and its demand for realness were centered on the realities and actual experiences of rappers (Dimitriadis 2015: 143). This idea has then been translated into the appreciation of localized expression

also in Finland, for example rapping in Finnish about issues pertaining to Finnish society and the rappers' own lifeworld.

Authenticity as staying connected to one's own socio-cultural and spatial roots is particularly linked with the notion of hip hop as "black" culture, and the fear that the connection between the largely poor and working class communities that gave birth to hip hop would be eroded (Ogbar 2007). This connectedness to local realities is precisely what rap fans have grown to value and seek for in the art form. Also, like McLeod (1999), Forman (2002: 213–216) notes that authenticity and the local realities of artists became attached to the issue of whether or not subcultural underground expression is the only acceptable form of hip hop when hip hop became a global and commercially viable form of cultural expression. According to Forman (2002: 218), the notions of "staying 'hardcore'" and "keeping it real" also surfaced after the commercial interest in hip hop seemingly threatened the genre with "cooptation or sanitization by forces displaying no commitment to or stake in the culture's tradition and continuance." Hip hop's assimilation into the mainstream and the resulting inauthenticity has thus been a central facet of hip hop's overall authenticity discourse. Media studies scholar Kembrew McLeod's (1999) oft-cited study on hip hop's authenticity discourse discusses the issue from this angle, based on a variety of data (media articles, online forums, artist and other interviews). McLeod (1999) lists semantic dimensions that are categorized into "real" and "fake" according to whether or not they express hip hop authenticity. McLeod's study is very useful in highlighting what types of discursive cultural-historical and personal-experiential arguments there may be, which is why I am discussing it here in more detail to illustrate my own binary division of cultural-historical and personal-experiential authenticity.

According to McLeod (1999), authenticity arguments are used to discursively create and preserve hip hop's identity as defying assimilation into mainstream or to other genres of music. McLeod (1999) outlines that hip hop authenticity encompasses 1) representing one's "true" self instead of following mass trends; 2) maintaining hip hop as a "black" rather than "white" expression; 3) remaining underground as opposed to open commercialism; 4) heterosexual masculine "hardness" as opposed to "feminine" softness; 5) preserving the social location of the "street" as opposed to suburban middle class affiliations (in essence, remembering where hip hop comes from); and 6) staying true to hip hop's roots, the "old school," instead of becoming a mainstream "sell-out." These dimensions form the social-psychological, the racial, the political-economic, the gender-sexual, the social-locational, and the cultural dimensions, respectively.

In the two-fold division utilized in this study, McLeod's social-psychological dimension (1) fits under the second category of personal-experiential arguments (discussed further below), whereas the other dimensions (2 to 6 above) consist largely of the social and cultural aspects of hip hop and thus fit the category of

cultural-historical arguments. However, McLeod's last dimension (6) also contains age-related arguments, where older hip hop generations advance their authenticity arguments with personal experience, thus fitting both categories. Regarding McLeod's central thesis about fears of assimilation, similarities can be detected in the Finnish hip hop scene and the amount of "hating" directed at Cheek after his commercial success has turned him from a rapper into a pop star (Westinen 2014; Rantakallio 2018a).

In Finland, an appeal to rap's historical roots in tough, urban and predominantly black neighborhoods (see McLeod's dimensions 2 and 5) has been less common as artists recognize the cultural distance between Finnish rap and its US counterpart. Yet, also Finnish artists apply what Williams (2014: 29) calls historical authenticity, referencing hip hop history by namedropping an influential artist, album, song etc. in their lyrics or sampling a canonized piece of music (hip hop or a related genre) (see also Speers 2014: 206), which to some extent relates to dimension 6. Additionally, as Hess (2005a: 374) notes, "the concept of authenticity often centers on the performance's proximity to notions of an original culture which at one time existed outside the record industry"; this is not unique to hip hop but a notion widely present in popular music more generally (Hess 2005a: 374; Moore 2002).

However, the local (Finnish) experience became and remains a central trope in Finnish rap discourses, and, as was mentioned in section 3.1.1 on Finnish hip hop history, the appreciation of localization has also translated into a rich usage of regional dialects and slang in Finnish rap songs marking geocultural affiliations. To a large extent, authenticity became associated with using local language and talking about local issues in Finland (Mikkonen 2004; Paleface 2011). This relates to a similar development that has taken place all over the world when globalization processes have transported hip hop into various local contexts in which the cultural expression has then been indigenized (Dyndahl 2008; Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003). Thus, in the Finnish context like elsewhere outside the US, hip hop has been locally appropriated and therefore dimensions such as McLeod's (1999) above cannot be used as such to make sense of hip hop's authenticity discourse in other locations. It becomes evident how highly contextual the notion of authenticity is, hence ethnographic methods among others are necessary in providing more information about how artists and fans make sense of and construct authenticity. Still, McLeod's dimensions depicting "real" hip hop as an underground (3) and masculine expression (4) ring true also in Finland to a large extent (see e.g. Mikkonen 2004).

I argue, then, that Finnish rap authenticity is essentially different from the US in at least two aspects: race/skin color/ethnicity, and class (2 and 5 in McLeod above). Understanding this contextual difference is crucial as the analysis in this study makes critical comparisons to US authenticity discourse. So-called ghetto authenticity has been important in hip hop, reflecting the centrality placed on the story regarding the

birth and origins of hip hop as "black" music and several artists' racial and socio-economic background (Rose 1994; McLeod 1999; Jeffries 2011: 62). Ogbar (2007: 39) asserts that "[a]t its most fundamental level, 'realness' in hip-hop implies an intimate familiarity with the urban, working-class landscapes that gave rise to hip-hop in the 1970s." There are no ghettoes in Finland, but representing your neighborhood and your vernacular have also become very important here (e.g. Nieminen 2003). In Finland's hip hop scene, skin color and ethnicity matter, but in different ways. The norm of rap as black culture and white rappers being its opposite and hence inauthentic (McLeod 1999; Ogbar 2007: 55–56) cannot be applied as such; as Finnish rappers have been predominantly white and middle class, this norm does not operate in similar ways in Finland (Himma 2016: 18). Westinen (2016: 286) notes that

> [w]hereas in North American hip hop culture, stereotypically, Whites are seen and treated as the Other [...] in Finnish society and hip hop scene, it is the 'Black' artists who are the novices and outsiders, but who nevertheless can claim authenticity vis-à-vis the US hip hop culture in terms of the colour of their skin.

Westinen thus points out that because of the predominantly white hip hop scene in Finland, the culture's racial codes work differently than in the US, yet similarity in terms of physical features (for example skin color) can be read as authenticating factors for non-white Finnish artists because of the historical connection and association of hip hop culture with non-white communities in the US. Race is not a simple matter of skin color but of socio-cultural positioning (Ogbar 2007: 60). Being white implies different things in a country like Finland where the history regarding colonialism, white supremacy, and slavery is different from the US, for example. Naturally, this does not make Finland immune to such historical legacies and discourses; in public discussion, the "exceptional" nature of Finns as historically colonized by Sweden and Russia tends to be accentuated (cf. e.g. Tervonen 2017) whereas the colonialist attitudes and racist politics towards the Sámi and Roma people are still largely erased (cf. e.g. Tamminen 2018). Simultaneously, the white majority continues to exercise "color-blindness" and racialization of non-white rappers in Finland (see Himma 2016; Karhu 2015). The performance and performativity of race is thus clearly a crucial aspect in hip hop.

To further highlight how various social categories and traits intersect in the construction of cultural-historical authenticity, I wish to bring up an example of a US artist who has been regarded by many as credible. Eminem's intricate rhyming skills (cf. also Kautny 2015) honed in battle rap circles and later his status as a protégé of an established and respected hip hop producer/artist/entrepreneur, Dr. Dre, his familiarity with the racialized class consciousness of hip hop due to having grown up in a poor, predominantly black urban environment, as well as recognition of his white privilege in

a predominantly white-controlled music business have afforded him the position of an authentic white hip hop artist in the eyes of many (Hess 2005a). Credibility is thus based on his perceived ability to demonstrate cultural understanding of hip hop as a historically class- and race-based culture (e.g. Ogbar 2007: 60), to a certain extent succeeding in a racial performance of blackness while keeping his "white" lyrics and accent (Hess 2005a: 382) and exhibiting skillfulness in the artistic realm (rapping) (Hess 2005a), but also on his often aggressive performance of heterosexual masculinity as a cis-male rapper, thus fitting the traditional confines of hip hop. Clearly, there is a complex power dynamic at play in determining who is considered authentic, but in a genre dominated by heterosexual men of color narrating what goes on in poor, urban settings (cf. e.g. Rose 1994; McLeod 1999; Ogbar 2007), aligning with that legacy – and providing a good "come-up" story – almost certainly aids.

Despite these prevalent race-, class-, sexual orientation- as well as gender-based ideas about who can be authentic (not to mention age or other categories) which intersect in various ways and the construction of which the hip hop community participates in, ultimately any individual can claim to be authentic and true to themselves (cf. Westinen 2014). Thus, authenticity in hip hop is arguably always experiential as well as socially constructed but the arguments used to construct it can still be based more on socio-cultural aspects or aspects pertaining to the individual artist's skills and experiences.

Personal-experiential authenticity

The second category of authenticity arguments centers on personal authenticity, supposedly emanating from and focused on the individual artist and expression. Thus, a performer cannot directly appropriate their expression from outside sources, as this would constitute "biting" (unauthorized direct copying), and thus result in inauthenticity. Arguments falling under this second category of authenticity emerge largely from the appreciation and highlighting of creativity in hip hop, often emphasized in hip hop histories (Rose 1994; Keyes 2002). However, the originality which is expected of a hip hop artist must not fall too far from the genre traits, or the artist risks portraying incompetence as a representative of that genre (Frith 1996: 57–58) and thus appearing as "fake," something many commercially successful pop rappers are accused of. As Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010: 471) state, originality is a key part of all discourses around art.

This second category of arguments thus contains many ideas which pertain to a common conception of Romantic "genius" artist in popular music (e.g. Anttonen 2017a: 34). Romanticism is an art philosophy of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, which developed in connection with the social and economical upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, and emphasizes authenticity and cherishes proximities

of many kinds, for example work as part of a person's identity, traditions, physical proximity to nature, and rurality (Keightley 2001: 135). Julius Bailey (2014: 128–129) explains Romanticism's connection with hip hop:

> This Romantic conception of art as an outpouring of the individual soul remains an important part of Western frameworks for understanding art, especially in popular discourse, and underpins the idea authenticity or "keeping it real" in hip-hop. Despite a growing appreciation of rappers as being capable of role-play and of distancing themselves from their crafted personae, they are still broadly presumed by audiences to be "representing," in a very direct way, their experiences, emotional states, and background.

This category of personal-experiential authenticity also contains what can perhaps be considered the most typical hip hop authenticity argument: that the artist speaks truthfully about who they are. This is very close to Moore's (2002) first person authenticity, and particularly McLeod's (1999) social-psychological dimension of hip hop authenticity, where incorporating personal life experience into music is highly valued, or even expected. Despite McLeod's study having a certain boundedness to time and place (the US in the 1990s), staying true to oneself instead of following mainstream trends is an aspect that still today keeps recurring, both in this study and in hip hop research globally (e.g. Ochmann 2013; Westinen 2014; Speers 2014). Rose (2008: 134) claims that "keeping it real" is associated with speaking truthfully, but that the phrase and its idea is also used as a defence against criticisms of hip hop (such as hip hop's sexism, materialism, racist stereotypes etc.). Rose (2008: 38) powerfully argues as to why and in what ways personal-experiential authenticity and keeping it real are perpetuated in hip hop:

> This assumption –that rappers are creating rhymed autobiographies– is the result of both rappers' own investment in perpetuating the idea that everything they say is true to their life experience (given that the genre has grown out of the African-American tradition of boasting in the first person) and the genre's investment in the pretense of no pretense. That is, the genre's promoters capitalize on the illusion that the artists are not performing but "keeping it real" –telling the truth […].

Rose thus explains the centrality of authenticity discourse with the artists' deliberate emphasis on the one hand, and African-American first person boasting tradition[31] on

[31] Hess (2005a: 375) observes a link between rap and traditions of testifying and bearing witness in which "the authority to speak is negotiated through claims to knowledge gained through lived experience."

the other – thus, the two categories of authenticity arguments outlined here are strongly linked. This centrality of authenticity is what Jeffries (2011: 119–120) claims differentiates hip hop from other genres of popular music, stating that although authenticity has been deemed important in all art, "hip-hop is unique in its incorporation of 'real talk' within the artistic commodities; the message of authenticity dominates entire songs, albums, and careers." Indeed, this "fiction of full-time autobiography" (Rose 2008: 38) or "lived experience" (Hess 2005b: 297) seems like a genre trait holding importance in hip hop unlike in any other genre of popular music. However, the general expectation of a congruence between artist persona and the actual person appears to be non-genre specific in popular music (Auslander 2004; Anttonen 2017a; Negus 1995: 336).

This category of personal-experiential authenticity also relates to an anti-commercialist ethos as some artists claim that they are making music "independently" or "just for themselves" and not for the market; thus their music seemingly has no significant connection to commercial trends, preserving the independence and artistic integrity of the artist. This does not entail, however, that artists are against marketing their music altogether; it is their livelihood for which they aspire to get paid. These types of arguments are highly visible also among the artists in this study; in fact, the four Finnish rappers quite rarely use arguments which would fall under the first category of cultural-historical arguments described above. This, as I argue in the analysis chapters, is one way of constructing an alternative underground identity as a rapper.

It seems that lived, personal experience and "doing your own thing" in hip hop have been central for hip hop authenticity, and in many ways, it appears that the Finnish hip hop authenticity discourse has centered on this while blurring the race and class based notions of US hip hop to accommodate the predominantly middle class white male demographic of Finnish rappers and hip hop practitioners (Westinen & Rantakallio 2019). All in all, constructing authenticity appears to be connected with striving towards social belonging in the hip hop community and positive self-esteem (staying true to yourself) as an artist.

Finally, Speers (2014: 40) argues that "authenticity […] can be embodied and practiced too, by living a particular lifestyle […]." Speers also (2014: 194) critiques a solely discursive approach, urging that we "move beyond the level of discourse as this gets at the 'lived' (practised) nature of authenticity [...] what people say can be quite different from what they do and it is this inconsistency that is interesting and reveals what authenticity is and how it is negotiated." Equally Ochmann (2013: 443) calls for us to take into consideration the experiential and affective aspects of authenticity. The articulation of the idea of authenticity is, nonetheless, also discursive and always changing, and hence in this study "[c]ommitting to social constructionism does not mean that discourses would not have 'real' effects" (Anttonen 2017a: 50). Speers'

latter assertion above seems to assume that there is some kind of ontological authenticity ("what authenticity is") that can be discovered; my viewpoint in this study and in general is that, in terms of analysis, it is not possible to "find" or determine authenticity as anything other than a situational, contextually constructed idea, which can be (and likely is) experienced subjectively (cf. also Anttonen 2017a). This is not to contest that authenticity can be expressed and lived in concrete practices; I simply argue that it can at best be a "changing same." However, no one may know whether people's opinions and experience of authenticity is actually the same as others' because the process of sharing them is discursive; thus, in this study, I am looking at the discursive depictions of this lived experience.

The discourse around authenticity has also surfaced in the context of spirituality. In the next section, I discuss new spirituality and atheist trends in the post-Christian West.

3.2.2 The post-Christian West: new spirituality and atheism

The purpose of this section is to provide a general introduction into the spiritual trends, tendencies and religious studies theories about religiosity in the postmodern, post-Christian age in Western societies that are relevant to the rap music that this study maps. Although this chapter deals more with the macro-level of contemporary "new" or "alternative" spirituality (instead of so-called institutionalized or "world" religions) as well as atheistic trends, this backdrop is necessary for the more micro-level analysis conducted in further chapters below. The overall argument I wish to put forward is that some of these larger cultural-religious trends and discourses are represented on a micro-scale in contemporary Finnish underground rap. My approach is thus to some extent similar to religious studies scholars Anne Pessi and Nadia Jeldtoft (2012) who argue for the necessity of research on contemporary religiosity to be "particularly sensitive to the colorful range and complexity of individual religious expressions" (Pessi & Jeldtoft 2012: 178). Also religious studies scholar Mika Lassander (2012: 244) asserts that only studying the individual religious experience can "reveal the fundamental hybridity of contemporary religious identities and account for individual agency in the formation of these hybrids."

This section first discusses post-Christianity and so-called pick-and-mix religiosity, then the variety of related religious tendencies often placed under the heading "new spirituality," after which contemporary Western atheistic trends are delineated shortly. Although these themes are clearly present in the music and ideas of this study's artists, within the limits of this work it is not possible nor purposeful (given the discourse analytic methodological framework) to draw definitive conclusions about the exact beliefs or religions manifest in the case study's artists' music and other expressions. They themselves often stress that their worldviews do not fit within any standard religions; vagueness and syncretism is the quintessential

characteristic of so-called new spirituality, or "cultic milieu" (Hanegraaff 1996: 16), as well as new religious movements (NRMs): "New Religious Movements, the New Age, and new spirituality, escape the boundary of what is defined as religion, involving neither social movement nor system nor institutions" (Arweck 2007: 254).

I will first discuss the origins and type of "vagueness" that contemporary Western religiosity and worldviews exhibit before moving on to spiritual and atheistic trends relevant to this study.

Post-secular, post-Christian, pick-and-mix

The focus of this section is on Western religious landscape, and the theories discussed below are thus confined to this limited area. Like in the works of many scholars of religion (e.g. Casanova 2012; Zuckerman 2007; cf. Brown 2013), "West" or "Western" refers here to the geographical areas (Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand) where the below-described structural and social changes have largely taken place. Albeit the US especially is very different from Western Europe for example in terms of Christianity's current status in society, the trend of new spirituality and interest towards East Asian and South Asian religions, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, is generally considered to have originated in US counterculture of the 1960s and then traveled to other parts of the West. Similarly, Hyman (2010) characterizes the recent surge of interest towards atheism as related to the vacant space left by Christianity upon its decline, albeit mainly outside the US. The US is still heavily Christian both in terms of believing and belonging whereas Europe is more secularized; "secular" in Europe's case refers particularly to being "irreligious," the declining numbers of church membership and of other visibly religious practices, especially in Western Europe (e.g. Casanova 2012; Pasquale & Kosmin 2013: 452; Hunt 2003).

The secularization theory has been dealt with and criticized extensively elsewhere (e.g. Casanova 1994; Partridge 2004; Gorski et al. 2012; Kääriäinen et al. 2005), hence I will not touch upon it here. The term *post-secular* (alternatively post-secularism or post-secularity), albeit problematic in its current theoretical imprecision and sometimes normative usage (see Nynäs et al. eds. 2012; see Taira 2012: 400), is often used to denote how Western societies have experienced a pluralization and increased public visibility of religion and belief, while scholars who use it also critically address the shortcomings of the secularization theory (Moberg et al. 2012: 6). It becomes clear that the societies in question are largely culturally and historically Christian ones; hence, for example Casanova (2012) speaks of Western Christian secularization while also acknowledging the increase in the public visibility of religion in the West. Moberg et al. (2012: 4) highlight that Jürgen Habermas, who has been at the frontline developing the term, does not

consider the term suitable for the United States. This further underscores that "post-secular" is mostly applied to societies where particularly Christianity's socio-cultural influence is declining.

Post-Christian refers to a shift particularly in European thinking, starting from the Middle Ages when faith in a Christian God went unchallenged to today when engagement with religion is more complex and most people acknowledge and reflect on the variety of worldview options (Casanova 2012: 30). Christianity still plays a central role in Western societies and culture (for example in terms of mores, holidays, ideas about morality) despite declining numbers in church membership and stronger separation of religion and politics, but it must now compete with other religious and cultural influences more than before. In the age of post-Christianity, the supposedly divine authority of the Church to dictate truths and lifestyles of society's members, and its emphasis on affording less focus on the present due to its promise of a better hereafter, have in many ways evaporated (Cupitt 1998: 218): "historically-maintained identity, continuity, and objective Truth have disappeared" (Cupitt 1998: 219). Campbell (2007: 345–350) argues that contemporary Christianity in fact shares several traits with alternative spiritualities such as New Age as both are heavily focused on "self-spirituality" and personal, therapeutic connection with God or higher being. In this sense, post-Christianity here does not negate Christianity's continued cultural influence, but refers particularly to the loosening grip of external authorities to dictate individual's beliefs and experiences. Christianity has also been faced with the need to accommodate societal transformations in terms of its doctrines and structure (Hunt 2002: 103–105). However, while this study acknowledges that Christianity is also still a formative religion for millions of believers in the West, as evidenced for example by the substantial number of Evangelical Christians, Christian faith is not under focus here.

Because this study deals with the rap culture of Finland, a country where (protestant) Christianity has been the dominant religion affecting society and culture and its decline is the specific form of secularization under focus here, I use the term "post-Christianity" instead of "post-secularity." This also highlights the inherent problems with much of post-secularity theories, as they purportedly represent larger global trends which are, however, mostly confined to a very limited area, the West, as delineated above. As sociologist of religion Peter Beyer (2007: 171–173) discusses, Western Christianity often serves as the standard based on which concepts are developed and other religions and their organization and development are analyzed. Further, Casanova (2007: 108–109) notes that "secularization [...] makes sense within the context of the particular [...] transformation of Western European Christianity from the Middle Ages to the present [...][b]ut the category becomes problematic once it is generalized as a universal process [...]." While secularity as a phenomenon has been highly debated, as mentioned above (whether such a

development or a secular period ever actually took place) – which further blurs the meaning of "post-secular" – the cultural dominance of Christianity in Western societies over the past centuries is undeniable; consequently, the term post-Christianity offers more precision and explanatory power in the context within which this study operates.

In the field of religious studies, the term *pick-and-mix* religion has often been utilized to describe, on the one hand, the decline of so-called traditional religious movements and institutions[32] such as Christianity, and on the other hand, the availability of numerous religious ideas, communities, and beliefs, not unaffected by the globalizing flows and forces such as the Internet and other technologies which have brought about a revolution of information (Taira 2006: 72–76; Roof et al. eds. 1995; Parsons 1993: 296–298; cf. Sutcliffe 2003; cf. Hamilton 2000). Media and popular culture are also significant in contributing to freer circulation of ideas (cf. Moberg et al 2012: 16). Globalization in this way relativizes cultural and religious ideas: individuals become accustomed to such multiplicity, and form their worldviews while being aware that they are but one choice among many possibilities (Frisk & Nynäs 2012: 52; see also Hunt 2002: 29). This, then, results in the diversity and syncretism evident in many religious expressions and identifications today. This is also closely related to the "subjective turn" where an increasing number of individuals mold their religious worldview based on personal needs and beliefs (Heelas & Woodhead 2005). Instead of being fixed entities, many religions have now become *cultural resources* from which to draw from rather freely (Taira 2006: 23, 55–56, 211; cf. Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 35). In Finland, for example, among people who practice New Age, "Christian teachings are being reinterpreted, rather than rejected altogether" but from an individualized perspective (Sohlberg & Ketola 2015: 136). A majority of Finns also appear to consider individual authority more pertinent in spiritual matters than that of established religions (Sohlberg & Ketola 2015: 137).

Despite its useful broadness, pick-and-mix religiousness as a sole analytical concept does not adequately describe the situation in Western countries where a trend of new spirituality is evident but also religious fundamentalism and conservatism are points of stability for some people in a rapidly changing world seemingly characterized by political and economic instability (Cupitt 1998: 227; Taira 2006; Pasquale & Kosmin 2013: 463; Dimitriadis 2015: 139). Taira (2006: 81) notes that religious fundamentalism among other worldviews gains strength from the

[32] Mika Lassander (2012: 244) discusses the criticism such scholars of religion as Meredith McGuire and Leonard Primiano have aimed towards a prevalent conception where the only "valid" or "official" religion is institutionalized religion. In practice, religion is also very much an individual lived experience although "institutional religion has been mistaken for the religious reality itself" (Lassander 2012: 244).

general insecurity that characterizes liquid modernity, as modern society fails to offer a sense of belonging, security, and authority. Speaking of "liquid religion" and post-Christianity then enables me to analyze the bigger picture of Western religiosity. To summarize, religions today function more as cultural resources than as solid societal structures (Taira 2006); post-Christianity can be conceived as a landscape with increased individuality and diversity due to globalization and increased immigration and cultural currents, with blurred or "liquid" boundaries between religion and non-religion where the remnants of a previously Christian-dominated culture are still in evidence socially and culturally. This theoretical framework seems suitable given the fact that with all four artists, Christianity came up unprompted in interviews, serving as evidence of the cultural backdrop within which the artists operate and make sense of their worldviews and their expression. Christianity served as a point of reference and critical comparison for them.[33]

Thus, in this study, I wish to underline how "boundaries between religion and the (non-religious) secular have become porous" (Taira 2012: 400), and how both spiritual and atheistic ideas can exist and be drawn from by rap artists in their music and interviews in individual ways. Partridge (2004: 44) calls this co-existence of secularization and new spiritual trends "a dialectical process of the re-enchantment of the secular and the secularization of the sacred" (see also Heelas & Woodhead 2005: 9–10). As Western societies have grown more stable both economically and politically, an increasing number of people have also become nonbelievers particularly from 1950s and 1960s onwards (Brown 2013: 230–233; cf. also Zuckerman 2007). The boundaries between sacred and profane are melting in connection with processes of neoliberalization and globalization and how they affect values and socio-cultural trends; states are striving to accommodate their increasingly multicultural populations while implementing politics which decrease institutionalization and increase privatization and entrepreneurialism. At the same time, changing discourses and practices around religion, science, nature, and holistic well-being are causing these boundaries to evaporate and shift, and affect religion's social placement. (Moberg et al. 2012: 11–13.) Worldviews are not necessarily solely religious or atheistic anymore (Pasquale & Kosmin 2013: 463).

Next, I focus on the current spiritual trends of Western religiosity. I share Partridge's (2004) assessment that the rise of so-called new spirituality – or what he

[33] See also Wood (2007: 157) who notes in his study that while the subjects engaged in various holistic and spiritual activities, they also reflected on their Christian unbringing and "saw their present activities as biogprahically related to this early religious practice." This is also a prime example of how I conceive post-Christian religiosity: Christianity still shapes religiousity culturally and serves as a backdrop, but is not necessarily the formative element of people's worldview or religious practice.

calls "occultural milieu" – is part of the same process of traditional religions losing influence in society and individual and often mystical experiences becoming central. This entails the growing popularity and mainstreaming of what have traditionally been referred to as "alternative" forms of spirituality of religiousness, or (sometimes pejoratively) New Age. The individual choice or even consumerism of religion, and more importantly the individual experience, are the determining characteristics of these new religious forms (Giordan 2007: 171; Partridge 2004: 16, 34). The logic behind this seemingly "everything goes" way of thinking is explained by Roger Gottlieb (2013: 86; cf. also Partridge 2004: 16), as he states that "from a spiritual point of view religious assertions are metaphors," and further, that "[b]ecause the purpose of metaphors is to inspire and guide each of us on the spiritual path, there is no telling which tradition or combination of traditions will have the desired effect."

"New" spirituality

The term "spirituality" in its popular sense today covers a wide range of practices in religion, health care, education, and psychology which relate to spiritual and mental well-being and interest in holistic self-development (Partridge 2004: 48). Thus the term is now frequently used also outside of established and institutionalized religions.

When applying the term "new" in front of spirituality, as in the title of this work, my approach is similar to Partridge's (2004: 97) in that he wishes to underline a twentieth century phenomenon (and, in the present study, twenty-first century) and particularly the development that has taken place since the 1960s which some call "Easternization" (Campbell 2007) of the West or simply the mainstreaming of "alternative" spiritualities which draw heavily from so-called Eastern philosophies. By Eastern religions or philosophies, scholars often refer to Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and other religions originating in China, Japan, and India. Indeed, Partridge (2004: 85) draws attention to sociologist Adam Possamai's observation, quoting that "'it becomes almost an oxymoron to describe these spiritualities as 'alternative,' as they appear to be part of the dominant culture of today's society'" (cf. also Campbell 2007: 118). Even those who remain officially Christian, for example, are now experimenting more and more with these new spiritual forms (Partridge 2004: 44–45; Campbell 2007). Religious studies scholar Linda Woodhead (2001: 81–82) defines new spirituality as follows:

> [T]he New Spirituality is [...] *radically immanent.* It views everyday or phenomenal reality as a manifestation of a deep and unifying spirit or life-force, a stance which may also be described as *this-worldly monism,* for it maintains both that 'All is One,' and that it is through the phenomenal world (natural and human) that we gain access to 'the One'. It is therefore characteristic of the New

> Spirituality to *divinize the human and the natural.* Furthermore, the New Spirituality's continual stress on unity gives rise to a *universalist stance* in relation to other religions and cultures, all of which are viewed as potentially one by virtue of their common ability to bear witness to 'the One.' Finally, the New Spirituality tends to be strongly *optimistic, evolutionary and progressive,* maintaining that a new age of unity, peace and spiritual enlightenment is currently dawning. [All emphases in original.]

Many ideas mentioned in this quotation are visible in other scholars' works discussed below. While for example Frisk and Nynäs (2012: 51) criticize the usage of the word "new" in this context, I have, however, retained it here to differentiate between alternative trends and recent, looser forms of established religions (such as Christian mysticism). What has often been called New Age is included under the larger category of new spirituality in this study. New Age is understood here not as a movement, but more as a heterogeneous category of individualistic, this-worldly, syncretistic beliefs and practices drawing from a variety of sources, and which are characterized particularly by a holistic understanding of reality, an assumption about spiritual evolution, and sometimes an anticipation of a "new age" (a significant change in status quo and thus new phase in the history of the universe) (Taira 2006: 66–67; Sutcliffe & Gilhus 2013; Taves & Kinsella 2013; Sohlberg & Ketola 2015: 127, 134).[34]

[34] Today, more and more scholars have replaced the term and category of New Age with (new) spirituality; New Age ideas, which began as sub- and counterculture, have become part of popular culture with no clear form of a movement or coherent ideology (Taira 2006: 66; Sutcliffe & Gilhus 2013: 5). Hanegraaff (1996: 10–13) distinguishes between the New Age movement, which he characterizes as a movement of US origin rooted in 1960s counterculture and surfacing in the late 1970s, and New Age subculture with its "substantial market for books dealing with various aspects of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Jewish mysticism, Gnosticism, native American religions, as well as comparative mythology and traditional folklore." Furthermore, religious studies scholars Sutcliffe and Gilhus (2013) and Ann Taves and Michael Kinsella (2013: 84) among others underscore that the theosophist Alice Bailey was influential along with various 1950s' communities in transmitting New Age ideas into the countercultural era before New Age spiritualities became a broader phenomenon. It should also be noted that Hanegraaff's (1996) focus is on written sources only and thus does not fully account for the individual variety of experiences within New Age. Religious studies scholar Matthew Wood (2007), who has done empirical ethnographic field work, addresses the whole notion of New Age critically, as does Colin Campbell (2007). Wood (2007: 9) asserts that "no case has been convincingly made that an area of religious belief and practice that can be described as New Age exists [...] the framework of how those phenomena classified as New Age are analysed [needs to be changed]." Wood (2007: 8) identifies the problem within the scholarly research, stating that a large segment of studies have relied heavily on insiders' and authors' views without sufficient critical scholarly interpretation.

Some of the most prominent theorizations of recent developments in the (new) spiritual landscape of Western religiosity have been made by religious studies scholars Colin Campbell (2007), Gordon Lynch (2007), Paul Heelas et al. (2005), and Christopher Partridge (2004). While Campbell's (2007) theorization of the Easternization of the West was briefly mentioned above, Lynch (2007) speaks of a "progressive turn" which combines Eastern spiritual ideas with green and leftist political views and individual spiritual and mental growth (for a critique of Lynch's concept, see Taira 2009: 236–239). Heelas et al. (2005) speak of a subjective turn where the individual experience and authority take center stage in religiousity. The central structural change in Western religiousity entails that "authority […] lies within," hence the former, institutional organization of religion has to a large extent lost its role in people's spiritual life (Woodhead & Heelas 2000: 343; see also Wuthnow 1998: 8–9; Wood 2007: 37). Woodhead and Heelas (2000) among others call this detraditionalized religion. The main characteristic could be said to be fluid boundaries of the various movements within this development. Hence, the phrase "spiritual but not religious" has become commonplace in Western parlance to denote how people may read explicitly religious literature and seek (spiritual) happiness without necessarily subscribing to religious dogmas, or they mix aspects of different religions in their life without experiencing controversy (Gottlieb 2013: 70, 80). Pessi and Jeldtoft (2012: 161) note that religiosity has become multilocated in this way, and that this is an essential feature of post-secularity more generally. Traditional forms of collectivist religiousness are seemingly perceived as more and more ill-suited to the values and lifestyles of liberal, postmodern Western people, yet spirituality and mental and physical well-being are seen as deeply connected and worthy of investment. Similarly in Finland, mainstream values, the Lutheran Church, and new spiritual practices are largely able to coexist (Ramstedt & Utriainen 2018; Sohlberg & Ketola 2015: 136; Ketola & Sohlberg 2008: 226–227). Further, as Wood (2007: 3, 157) notes, although individuals pick and mix these various cultural resources, the various authors and teachers within the field of new spirituality can also hold considerable authority and swaying power.

In addition to Campbell (2007), also Partridge (2004) notes that a focus on the self and the authority of personal experience (as opposed to dogma or clergy for example) are perhaps the most important traits of new spirituality, or the few actually shared traits of this heterogeneous "cultic milieu." This phenomenon of new spirituality, encompassing New Age and particularly its non-dualist strand, which also manifests itself in the Finnish underground rap dealt with in this study, originates in the counterculture of 1960s and 1970s (Versluis 2014; cf. Hanegraaff 1996: 10). Taira (2006: 66–67), borrowing from religious studies scholar Steven Sutcliffe, delineates this development as having travelled from 1960s subculture to 1970s counterculture and from there onwards to current mainstream popular culture.

In Finland, these spiritual countercultural influences began to surface in the 1970s (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 63).

The various theoretical interpretations of the current stage of this process have different names and emphases, such as immediatism (Versluis 2014; see also quotation from Woodhead above), progressive spirituality (Lynch 2007), or more broadly, "re-enchantment of the West" (Partridge 2004). Versluis (2014: 181) calls immediatism "the contemporary pattern in the West" characterizing it as "an insistence that the Truth […] is directly available to us not as a result of a particular discipline or set of practices […] but rather as divine grace revealing an intrinsic truth of what it means to be human" (Versluis 2014: 178; compare Partridge 2004: 87 and why people are drawn to Eastern traditions).[35] Partridge's (2004) term, "re-enchantment" of the West, in turn, refers to the larger post-secular development including the popularity of alternative, hybrid religious forms. Partridge (2004: 147) notes that while occulture, his term for Western "occult culture" including for example theosophy, paganism, alternative medicine, psychology, paranormal, and Eastern spirituality, became a significant trend in the West, also "[…]popular music […] is a significant vehicle for occulture, in that key occultural streams use religious symbolism and even develop explicitly spiritual themes, which both reflect the countercultural interests of the producers and also contribute to the worldviews of the consumers[…]." Partridge (2004) reminds us also that occulture and Eastern spiritual influences in popular music are nothing new, considering for example the Beatles and their India-inspired phase in the 1960s.

While esoteric influences and particularly theosophy had a significant role in Finland in the early 20th century, since the 1960s the "new" spiritual trends (including for example Buddhism) visible elsewhere in the West have become an important part of Finland's alternative spirituality scene: events, magazines, bookstores, therapies, and other activities dedicated to spiritual practices outside of institutional religions have become more commonplace (Sohlberg & Ketola 2015).

[35] Versluis remarks that immediatism and New Age are not synonymous although they have a lot in common, "but it is important to recognize that contemporary immediatism came into being at the same time that the New Age emerged, in the 1960s and 1970s, in the wake of the counterculture. Althought immediatism and the New Age movement are separate phenomena, they emerge in a shared context and they often share characteristics." (Versluis 2014: 163.) According to Versluis (2014: 155–156), also gnosticism is central here, and he draws our attention to the centrality of experience: "[W]hat we see in the late 1960s counterculture –informed by Zen Buddhism, Vedanta, Tibetan Buddhism, and other non-dualist religious traditions – is an explicit emphasis on 'the mystical experience, the art experience, identity experience, unitive experience,'[…]*That* is what I'm terming 'gnosis,' which does not imply an end-state of illumination, but rather an inclination away from subject-object dualism and towards subject-object unity."

Yet, the Lutheran church and mainstream discourse around "New Age" often appears skeptical, or even derisive – hence practitioners have begun substituting New Age with the term "spiritual" (Sohlberg & Ketola 2015: 134–135). While research on the particularities of the adherents of Finland's alternative spirituality scene remains scarce, based on what for example Sohlberg and Ketola (2015) and Ramstedt and Utriainen (2018) suggest, Finns tend to follow general Western trends.

Besides reflecting the above-described ideas in their music, this case study's Finnish artists include several non-dualistic references in their music and also many socio-political themes in the music appear to draw from new spirituality; this entails for example criticism towards current human lifestyles and capitalist profit-seeking that are seen to contribute to the ignorance and exploitation of nature, other humans, and of oneself. Two non-dual views recur in the music of the artists analyzed in this study. One is the Buddhist belief that there is no inherent, permanent core in things, thus existence is characterized by impermanence and the notion of no-self. The second non-dual view is closer to Advaita Vedanta, and its idea of *atman* in *brahman*,[36] that individuals and their souls are manifestations of one, universal and eternal consciousness or being (see Taira 2006: 65 on New Age and "authentic self"; King 1999; see Campbell 2007: 356). In non-dualistic spiritual literature, which for example Julma Henri admits to having read, the deconstruction of such "illusions" as the self and body and dualism more generally are often characterized as ways towards so-called enlightened consciousness and towards a realization of the non-dual nature of reality (Davis 2010; Hanegraaff 1996: 277–278). Particularly contemporary Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism are central here as manifestations of this non-dual thought and of the immediatist view on enlightenment (cf. Davis 2010; cf. Versluis 2014) being available here and now. As space is limited, I will go further into the non-dual views in the analysis chapters, demonstrating how they manifest in the expression of Ameeba, Julma Henri, and Euro Crack. In this study, I have attempted to make only some distinctions between Buddhist and Hindu influences in the artists' music when they seem evident, but given the framework of new spirituality where both influences are frequent, it makes more sense to consider both as central resources which are mixed and drawn from freely according to individual preferences. Also Hinduism and Buddhism in themselves contain a wide variety of strands and variations, hence I do not purport to be able to represent

[36] "The profoundest truth which the *Upanisads* have to teach is this: there is a ground of being that permeates all and structures all; the visible world is but a transformation, a modification of part of it. While the phenomena are transient, the ground of being itself is eternal, unchanging. This ground of being can be realized by humans in their innermost consciousness. At the most intimate level *atman* and *brahman* are identitical: *tat tvam asi*, 'that,' the ultimate being, *you* are." (Klostermaier 1998: 91.)

universally held beliefs of these traditions but rather selected interpretations drawing from relevant research literature.

Particularly in the case of Ameeba, the ecological and neopagan strands of new spirituality and New Age are a crucial reference point. Pearson et al. (1998) use a broad term "nature religions" to encompass the variety of spiritualities that deal with the "reorientation [...] and a resacralisation of both external nature and our own physical embodiment" (Pearson et al. 1998: 1; see also Beyer 1998: 11, 17; Wickström & Illman 2012). In some of these ecologically concerned tendencies or movements, the non-dual thinking is particularly focused on (re-)establishing a sacred union between humans and nature, a return to a kind of "natural" or "holy" state (Wickström & Illman 2012: 218). This is sometimes also combined with Buddhist beliefs about the interconnectedness of all living things (King 1999: 152). Marshall (2001: 17) argues that both authenticity discourse and Western thinking more generally have centered on the individual; it is thus hardly surprising that the individual authentic spiritual experience is crucial in new spirituality. Partridge (2004: 96–97) also asserts that new spirituality needs to be understood in the context of neo-Romanticism to make sense of the new-found fascination with mysticism and connecting with oneness or some greater entity. Is the authenticity discourse thus a sign of the times, a yearning for stability, a "true" self amid existential insecurity? In discussing what he calls a progressive turn, Lynch (2007: 10) mentions that "progressives" tend to share "a search for religious forms that are authentic" and consider personal, first-hand spiritual experiences as valuable. This seems remarkably similar to a common notion of hip hop authenticity as staying true to oneself and speaking of one's own experience. Hence, although the focus in this study is on authenticity discourse in hip hop music, there is a somewhat similar discourse present within new spirituality as well. Indeed, there is a whole self-help literature based on exactly this thirst for connection through authenticity (cf. also Speers 2014: 233). Interestingly, hip hop artists such as 50 Cent and Ice-T have written books about themselves with clear self-help tones, simultaneously asserting the authenticity of their craft.[37] Self-help and new spirituality are largely connected.

Contemporary spirituality largely speaking is now more liberal, inclusive, and tolerant, which accommodates the inner authority and experience centered religiosity (Frisk & Nynäs 2012: 54–55). As noted above, the decentralization of religious authority (moving from institutions to individuals) has largely made this possible. Above else, contemporary spirituality seems to be characterized by individuality.

[37] 50 Cent & Robert Greene (2009), *The 50th Law*; Ice-T & Douglas Century (2011), *Ice: A Memoir of Gangster Life and Redemption – from South Central to Hollywood*. For analyses on 50 Cent's and Ice-T's books, see Miller (2013) and Forman (2014), respectively.

Following Lynch (2007) and others, I am compelled to argue that one reason why new spirituality is increasingly popular is because it allows individuals more independence in formulating their worldview and more flexibility in choosing sets of values while acknowledging science's capacity to explain the world alongside spiritual ideas. In essence, new spirituality seems compatible with a scientific worldview without necessarily imposing a dualistic juxtaposition between the two.

Fuzzy atheism

I do not perceive new spirituality and atheism as necessarily stark opposites but as part of the same post-Christian religious landscape (see also Partridge 2004: 64; see Robertson 2007: 25): both religious and secular or atheist worldviews and ideas are cultural resources which can be applied in rap lyrics, for example. Similarly, Taira (2006: 13, 39) assesses that we can indeed consider secularization and sacralization – the kind of developments described above in connection with publicly visible spirituality and individualization – as occurring simultaneously. Further, nowadays there are also atheists who openly practice some aspects of spirituality, such as meditation (Taira 2012; Sillfors 2017), hence it is indeed impossible to clearly separate nonreligiousness and religiousness. According to Heelas (1998: 3), this blurring of the secular-sacred line can also be seen in connection with individualism; "'truth' is seen in terms of 'whatever works for me'" which reflects pragmatism and relativism (Heelas 1998: 5). Or as religious studies scholars Laura Wickström and Ruth Illman (2012: 219) note, "[w]orldviews are not necessarily either religious or secular; they may also combine elements of rational secularity with enchanted spirituality. This acknowledgement poses a challenge to traditional theories of secularization and differentiation [...]." This aspect of postmodernity, I argue, is also compatible with an atheistic worldview: as personal preference is now often given priority over institutional and social views, disbelief is a socially valid option (Hunt 2002: 19).

Atheism, or the nowadays highly visible so-called new atheism (Zenk 2013; Taira 2015; LeDrew 2012), is not one, coherent movement but rather a spectrum. For the purposes of this study, particularly so-called positive atheism, the explicit rejection of god(s) or a belief in their non-existence (Bullivant 2013: 14–15; cf. Taira 2015: 21) is a suitable analytical characterization of the way in which rapper Khid constructs a discourse around both his views on religion *and* on authenticity in hip hop: he clearly resigns from a belief in any spiritual entities and, using atheism as analogy, from hip hop's perceived normative authenticity discourse. In Khid's case, this is particularly atheism denouncing Christianity but also new spirituality. Positive atheism frequently entails publicly taking on the identity of an atheist (Taira 2015: 20–21, 240). Implicit or negative atheism, in turn, refers to a lack of belief in god(s),

which includes for example agnostic positions or simply indecisiveness (Martin 2007a: 2; Bullivant 2013: 14; Taira 2015: 21) or indifference (Quack & Schuh eds. 2017). Alternatively, these two positions can be termed explicit and implicit atheism (Taira 2008: 52–53).

Atheism thus connotes, in the broadest sense, the absence of theism; etymologically, atheism refers to being without god(s) (*a* + *theos*) (Martin 2007a: 1). Thus, in this study atheism is understood in broader terms than simply as opposing theism. Rather, atheism becomes defined as a lack of belief in supernatural phenomena, thus connoting a naturalist stance: according to a naturalist worldview, "'the natural world is all that there is'" (Bullivant 2013: 19). This is also the basis of secular humanism (Ylikoski 2017: 159). Pinn (2003) discusses secular humanism of African American rap artists along similar lines, concluding that certain artists complicate the already complex relationship of rap music and religion through their critical posturings. They draw attention to the corporeal and contextual (cultural, historical) aspects in musical meaning making while rejecting institutional religion and approaching a "humanist ethic, which moves beyond a theistic one" (Pinn 2003: 92). Occasionally, this may result in nihilism (Pinn 2003: 92, 98).

As Michael Martin (2007a: 2) underscores, atheism is not a simplistic worldview, instead atheists hold very complex and different views depending on which deity or supernatural entity or being is in question. Or, as Hyman (2007: 28–29) notes, atheism is just as varied as theism, and atheism transforms itself along with changing conceptions of god(s). When considering general tendencies in Western Europe, which Finland is a part of, it becomes evident that atheistic beliefs are also vague or "fuzzy" as many people have individual ways of portraying indifference or negative atheism towards various religious traditions, and they may also mix a general lack of belief with practices borrowed from alternative spiritualities (cf. Lee 2013: 590–591). Clearly, measuring nonbelief is a very difficult task, and, as for example Alister McGrath (2004) demonstrates, its history is as long and diverse as that of religious views, indicating however that Western atheism is bound with the idea of "emancipation through reason" (LeDrew 2016: 13).

In the West, atheism or non-belief tends to be a predominantly white, Judeo-Christian, and male phenomenon (Brown 2013: 231; Keysar & Navarro-Rivera 2013; Mahlamäki 2012). Nevertheless, an increasing number of women and feminists identify as atheists or nonbelievers (Mahlamäki 2012; LeDrew 2016: 204), and, at least in the US, atheism is becoming less white (Barna Group 2015). Some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that higher levels of atheism correlate with social and economic security and stability, thus the US being an exception among Western societies can be explained with its "individualistic meritocracy" (Pasquale & Kosmin 2013: 454; cf. Zuckerman 2007: 57; cf. LeDrew 2012: 71). Finland is globally well-known for its high-quality education, social security system and

stability, thus fitting the bill. Yet, the percentage of Evangelical Lutheran church members (overwhelmingly the biggest denomination) remains relatively high, around seventy percent of the population in 2016, albeit there are more members resigning than joining every year, many of whom are in their 20s or 30s.[38] Until roughly the 1980s, over ninety percent of Finns were Lutherans (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 82). Although Christianity is declining in Finland, this is more evident in larger cities than in the countryside (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 171) and among young people than elderly (Taira 2015: 241). Theologians and religious studies scholars Kimmo Kääriäinen et al. (2005: 85) note that "[r]eligiosity in Scandinavia, as in the whole of western Europe, is often described with the expression 'belonging without believing.'"

This applies rather well to Finland as well: although the number of people identifying as atheists is low (ca. three percent), some of them are still members of the Church, and the percentage of people who consider themselves as not very religious is around thirty-five percent (Taira 2015: 241–253; cf. Mahlamäki 2012: 60). However, in the *Gallup Ecclesiastica* survey in 2015[39] (with over four thousand respondents), sixteen percent identified as atheists and twenty-four percent as nonreligious (Ketola 2016: 63, 84). As religious studies scholar Tiina Mahlamäki notes, in Finland "atheism has not become popular on a large scale; a more likely and common standpoint is to be religiously indifferent" (Mahlamäki 2012: 64). A Finnish atheist is typically an unmarried young male with liberal values and residing in an urban area (Taira 2015: 253–254).

While today Finns' attitudes towards atheists and nonbelievers are generally neutral, historically atheists and those who had resigned their church membership have been associated with being anti-religion, communists, and supporting the Soviet Union; several Finnish public advocates of free thought have indeed been politically on the left (Ylikoski 2017: 160–163, 168). The Union of Freethinkers of Finland (founded in 1937) and Finnish Humanist Association (founded in 1986) along with other associations work rather actively to defend religious freedom, criticize the Lutheran church's special position in the Finnish society, and promote secularity and the rights of nonbelievers (Ylikoski 2017). Meanwhile, the political right in Finland is currently navigating more visibly towards conservative

[38] See Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko (2017); see also Taira (2015: 247–248). As regards other Christians, the number of Catholics in Finland has nearly doubled during the past two decades, likely due to immigration, whereas the number of Orthodox Christians has remained more or less the same. In 2015, Orthodox Christians made up roughly 1.1 % of the population and Catholics 0.2 % in Finland. (Tilastokeskus 2015.)

[39] The online survey, commissioned by The Church Research Institute and conducted by an independent market research company Taloustutkimus, sampled people aged 15–79 living in Finland (Ketola et al. 2018: 76).

Christianity, much like elsewhere in the West, yet for example the leader of the Finnish populist party True Finns, Jussi Halla-aho, has publicly identified as a nonbeliever (cf. Rautio 2019). He appears more representative of the atheist right and promotes white masculinity and antifeminist politics like several new atheists as well as Christian fundamentalists, thus seemingly proving that atheism is not always resolutely opposed towards religion but rather adaptable to work within a white supremacist framework together with religious conservatism (cf. also LeDrew 2016: 187). Indeed, atheism does not require an antagonistic attitude towards religion nor does critique of religion require explicit atheism (cf. Mahlamäki 2012: 64).

Nonbelief became increasingly popular in the West starting from 1960s onwards. Perhaps coincidentally, the US counterculture which influenced new spirituality and was discussed above, was forming at that same time. Historian Callum Brown (2013: 233) states that "the rise of new atheism and other philosophical movements […] was very much located in this post-1960s demographic transition to widespread social liberalism[…]." Campbell (1978: 153–154) considers that particularly the individualism and tolerant syncretism of new spiritualities have made them compatible with secularizing contemporary societies. Further, Brown (2013: 234) underscores that in the US, in states such as Oregon and California, NRMs, New Age, and alternative spiritualities arising from counterculture served as "a route for many to the atheistic and no religionist tendencies which have also been strongest in those states." Religious studies scholar Anthony B. Pinn (2013: 30) notes that humanism and other secular tendencies have increased in the US particularly from the 1990s onwards. During history, there have also been several deliberate attempts to promote and advance secularity and atheism in society, particularly from Enlightenment, "the age of reason," onwards, and increasingly during the twentieth century (Pasquale & Kosmin 2013: 454–456; McGrath 2004).

I am particularly interested in positive atheism as a determining worldview, and its functional similarities with spiritual or religious views; as psychologist Miguel Farias (2013) also underscores, atheists have equally meaningful ideas and beliefs about the world as religious people. For many atheists, belief in science and progress operates in a similar way to religion, alleviating feelings of insecurity and existential anxiety by providing "a tightly ordered understanding of the world that eschews randomness" (Farias 2013: 494). Natural sciences in particular have historically offered a critical alternative for explaining "how the world works" when currents of non-belief began to emerge more prominently during Enlightenment and onwards, pairing up well with atheism (Edis 2013: 404). Religious discourse was increasingly pushed to the private sphere, becoming a personal matter (Carrette & King 2012: 63).

Although scholars tend to agree that atheism is not a religion (Martin 2007b), atheism in its passive form is not always necessarily opposed to religion,[40] as many religions deny the existence of god(s) and there are atheists who respect or even admire certain aspects of religions (Martin 2007b: 230). Today, although atheists generally consider religions as irrational (Taira 2012) and do not acknowledge any supernatural entities, there are atheists who deem it possible to combine atheism with mysticism and spirituality (e.g. Sillfors 2017). For example, some see meditation as beneficial and worthwhile, although most only when stripped from its religious connections (Taira 2012). Lee (2013: 596–597) notes that particularly negative atheism in practice has many similar functions as religion, both on philosophical level, as unbelief becomes assembled with other existential questions and ideas about life and meaning making more generally, and on a social level as creating in-group and out-group distinctions and binding groups of people together during secural life-cycle rituals, for example. Indeed, if functionality (what the worldview does) is the defining criterion instead of belief in supernatural (cf. Hunt 2002: 8–9), then secular and religious beliefs have far more in common. Also, practitioners of new spirituality and atheists tend to share a high level of individualism, non-conformity, and liberal-mindedness (Farias 2013: 477).

This section was by no means meant to be exhaustive, but rather an introduction into religious studies theories about new spirituality (particularly its Easternized, non-dualist strand) and atheism. The central point I wish to highlight once more is made by sociologist Colin Campbell (1978: 150):

> [S]ecularization and the rise of new religiosity are […] simply two aspects of the same process, i.e. the change-over from church religion to spiritual and mystic religion; a fundamental process of social and cultural change in which identical forces can be seen to be responsible for the decline of the one and the emergence of the other.

The fluidity of this topic has posed a challenge during this study as well, from writing to interviewing. I assumed when embarking on this research journey that I would only discover different pro-spiritual ideas embedded in the overall discourse of spirituality/religion used by the artists. However, Khid constructs a more critical and complex discourse around spirituality in his responses as well as in his music (see particularly album *Ohi*, Khid 2016a), both of which will be discussed further in

[40] Martin (2007b) contends that Buddhism, Jainism, and Confucianism can be seen as atheistic in a narrow sense as they reject the idea of a personal god. Yet such terminology in this case seems rather ethnocentric, as the three religions do not have a conception of a personal god in the first place (Gothóni 2000: 41–43).

analysis chapters. Indeed, my initial hypothesis about the logic behind the artists' use of spiritually suggestive language and audiovisual imagery was too narrow to account for the answers I received to my research questions. In the analysis chapters, I aim to deepen these themes through specific examples from my data which are discussed together with research literature. As Khid was the only one of the artists exhibiting atheistic ideas, atheism has a less prominent presence in this study than spirituality.

4 Worldviews, artist personas, and rap aesthetics

This chapter analyzes some of the central aspects of Ameeba's, Julma Henri's, and Khid's worldviews and how they manifest in the content and aesthetics of their music. Additionally, this chapter discusses artist personas and how the artists discursively construct the themes of spirituality/atheism in their music as a sign of authenticity drawing on their personal experiences and worldviews.

Subchapter 4.1 outlines the major religious and atheistic influences in the artistic expression of the aforementioned three artists. Subchapter 4.2 discusses artist personas and explores how the rappers construct their artistic expression as an "authentic" reflection of their worldviews. Finally, subchapter 4.3 focuses on how the four artists in this study construct a discursive dichotomy between two subgenres, "rap-rap" and deeper rap, what these two subgenres sound like, and how the artists describe the sound, content, and their own aesthetic preferences in their music as an alternative underground artistic identity and aesthetic.

4.1 Spirituality and atheism as sources of inspiration

The first two sections (4.1.1 and 4.1.2) of this subchapter focus on new spirituality, particularly individualistic expressions of environmentalism and channeling (Ameeba) and Eastern inspired pluralism (Ameeba, Julma Henri). The final section (4.1.3) discusses atheism (Khid).

4.1.1 Ameeba's environmentalism and channeling

In this section, I focus firstly on Ameeba's views on nature and the environment, and secondly, on his descriptions of channeling, a spiritual technique often associated with New Age. Ameeba stands out from the other artists in this study with his ecocritical lyrics, perhaps most pronounced on his 2016 album *Apocalypto* where he criticizes current consumptionist lifestyles, laments lack of connection between individuals and between humans and nature, and the (consequent) abuse of natural

resources. He also raps about the unequal distribution of wealth and profit-obsessed capitalists (see for example song "Occupy Hki," Ameeba 2016a). Musicologist Susanna Välimäki (2019) describes "eco rap" ("ekoräppi") as one subgenre of conscious rap which deals with the relationship between humans and nature in an age of environmental crises, binding environmental and social justice issues together. The topics cover not only climate change and its immanent consequences such as draughts, floods, and storms, but also criticism of political and neoliberal ideas and ideals leading to famine, ghettoization, and various forms of neo-colonialism, among other things (Välimäki 2019).

More importantly, Välimäki (2019) defines eco rap as encompassing also spiritual rap that features nature topics even if such rap does not directly address political questions: eco rap nevertheless examines and constructs an alternative to prevalent Western understandings and attitudes towards nature, making it inherently critical and political in its stance. Ameeba can also be categorized as part of the eco rap subgenre based on his music, and furthermore, he has collaborated with Paleface and Áilu Valle whose songs Välimäki (2019) discusses as examples of eco rap. Often rappers tend to collaborate with artists with whom they share stylistic or other values, and rappers interested in environmental issues appear to be no exception.

Ameeba's eco rap typically places nature at the center of its worldview and depicts nature's wellbeing as inextricably bound with that of human beings. Not only are such themes evident in Ameeba's lyrics, but they also manifest in his soundscape: for example, on his album *Apocalypto* (Ameeba 2016a), the 10th song "Henkireikä" ("Lifeline") is not a piece of music but a recording of a singing nightingale. As nature sounds are common in New Age related music (Hibbett 2010: 291; see also Välimäki 2015: 172), and Ameeba's ideas are closely related to such philosophies in many ways, this detail is significant for the present analysis. Nature is a prominent theme in Finnish music more generally, and forests are a common trope in all Finnish art. In Ameeba's music, nature is also depicted particularly as forests and dwelling there. Approximately seventy-five percent of Finland is covered by forests, the largest percentage in Europe (Metla 2012). Ameeba's music arguably reflects a nationally and culturally specific (Finnish) understanding of nature where forests are considered as a particularly salient part of the Finnish identity and mentality (see e.g. Laaksonen & Mettomäki eds. 1994; Laurén 2006; 2009; Kalliomäki 2012: 30–37).

Forests have historically been both a source of income and nutrition as well as a place for religious experiencing for Finns (Kalliomäki 2012; Roiko-Jokela 2000: 18; Pentikäinen 1994). They have traditionally offered Finns a (sacred) space for personal reconnection with nature, erasing the boundary between inner and outer world (Anttonen 1994: 26). In Ameeba's music, forests have a clear spiritual value, aiding in meditation and thus connecting with a higher entity.

In Ameeba's music, nature becomes a priority exceeding the importance of economic growth which is constructed as the norm in Western(ized) societies. For example, the song "Kowloon" from the *Apocalypto* album (Ameeba 2016a) offers an example of the destructive consequences that the current imbalance in societal values and distorted relationship between people and nature can lead to. The name alludes to the walled city of Kowloon in Hong Kong which was demolished in the early 1990s when the decayed urban area suffering from social and environmental problems was replaced with a park (see e.g. Nosowitz 2013). The lyrics of the song lament consumptionist values and lifestyles which affect our judgment in a way that we end up destroying our own species and the planet as we fail to appreciate and understand their worth:

> Always without company
> Even though your follower also has thousands of followers
> It is relative how much in the end is a lot
> And how much is enough
> Sales and big bills
> Won't banish those demons
> We know the price of everything but apparently not the worth of anything
> More profit ruthlessly at the expense of the planet
> Raping ourselves with this constant Midsummer
>
> *Aina vaan seuraa vailla*
> *Vaikka sua seuraavallakin on tuhannet seuraajansa*
> *Suhteellista mikä on lopulta paljon*
> *Ja paljonko lopulta riittää*
> *Alennusmyynnit ja suuret setelit*
> *Ei niitä demonei karkota*
> *Tiedetään kaikelle hinta muttei näköjään minkään arvoa*
> *Enemmän tuottoo armottomasti planeetan kustannuksella*
> *Raiskataan ittemme tällä jatkuvalla juhannuksella*
>
> ("Kowloon," Ameeba 2016a)

The lyrics above start with a word play ("seuraa," "seuraavallakin," "seuraajansa") which criticizes the lack of real human interaction in social media communication. The reference to continuous Midsummer festivities, arguably the most important celebration of the year in Finland (in addition to Christmas), accentuates the excess consumption which will lead to our demise, and urges the listener to think about sustainable choices. The beats and soundscape of the *Apocalypto* album, influenced by grime, ambient, and dub techno for example, construct a dystopian image of a

somber and overcrowded city filled with noise and filth, the sounds of decay echoing from the walls of the concrete jungle.[41] This idea of ruin can also be seen in the ominous dark red color and what seem like flames rising from the city in the album cover made by Mika Lehtonen (**Figure 1**).[42]

Figure 1. Cover of *Apocalypto* album on Ameeba's Bandcamp page (Ameeba nd.). Published with the permission of designer Mika Lehtonen.

Apocalypto (Ameeba 2016a) can be called a concept album. The name references apocalyptic ideas which can be found in many religious traditions, including Christianity and New Age. As Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1996: 98–99) formulates, "[i]n

41 For more on ambient drone music and apocalyptic ideas, see Demers (2013).

42 Similar imagery can be seen in the promotional poster for Francis Ford Coppola's motion picture *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Also in the Bible, a blood moon is featured in the Book of Revelations.

the typically apocalyptic vision, the new world comes as 'a catastrophe over what exists' and replaces the wordly order by a radically different, *transcendent* order" [emphasis in original]. Some New Age groups have featured similar ideas already in the 1950s (Hanegraaff 1996: 95) although these apocalyptic visions became less prevalent from the 1970s onwards (Taira 2006: 66). Such ideas often include a notion of a world ruled by escalating evil powers, as well as immanent judgment, battles, natural disasters, and finally a transition to a new era (Sutcliffe 1998: 34). In Ameeba's *Apocalypto*, humans and capitalists in particular are depicted as the culpables. Ameeba's own worldview is usually represented in his music as ecological and sustainable, some ideas seemingly borrowing from eco movements. Such movements have historically had a strong standing in Finland (Välimäki 2019). Laura Wickström and Ruth Illman (2012: 217) note that

> [t]he eco-movement has formed into a scene where dominant values such as economic growth, production, rationalism and progress are criticized and where the post-secular ideals of holism and eclecticism cater for new, spiritually informed understandings of the relationship between humanity and the earth. The interest in ecological issues is indeed an urgent one: environmental threaths are, together with poverty, disease, and conflict, considered as the most serious issues of our times.

Building on this, it is possible to interpret that Ameeba's album content and name refer to an ongoing environmental and societal decline and suffering which will be resolved sometime in the future, and that these events are part of supernatural order of things. The first song is entitled "Omen," the name hinting at the signs we can see around us of the approaching destruction, the apocalypse and end of humanity as we know it. The final song in turn is called "Määrittämätön," "Undefinable," where the refrain repeats the phrase "this is not the end" ("ei tää tuu tähän loppumaan"). This rather hopeful phrase suggests that the album does not forecast the end of all existence, but rather depicts a current demise and predicts a yet unknown but forthcoming change.[43] Such an interpretation warrants the use of the term New Age about Ameeba's worldview, as Ameeba's music predicts a larger shift in the world and a resulting

[43] A popularized text (Rantakallio 2018b) which I wrote for the Finnish *Voima* magazine about Ameeba also featured this interpretation. After reading it, Ameeba confirmed to me over private communication that my interpretation about the *Apocalypto* album's central idea was similar to his own views. (Ameeba p2018.)

change that will lead to a closer and more respectful relationship with nature.[44] This becomes evident also in his interview responses which commend natural forces, for example storms, as showing people their place in the world as less important and less powerful than nature (Ameeba i2017). The extract below is an illustration of this. Note also the capitalization of nature ("Luonto") at the end of this (e-mail) interview extract below which suggests that according to the "true" order of things, nature reigns over humans. In this way, Ameeba's response also deifies nature:

> INKA: Nature and human relationship with nature recurs in your songs. How/why did this topic become important in your music?
> AMEEBA: As long as people are a part of nature it's going to be a part of my music or part of everything. Humans should not be some separate entity but one with nature. Native peoples understand what estranged urbanites have forgotten. Here concepts such as going into nature are used as though it was some separate place somewhere when it should be evident that we live in symbiosis with nature. You also cannot go into nature to take but instead nature gives. [...] E.g. storms and tsunamis are great in that they put people in their place. Or perhaps Nature is just trying to make people see the connection with their own species which emerges briefly after a disaster.
>
> *INKA: Luonto ja ihmisten suhde luontoon toistuu biiseissäsi. Miten/miksi aiheesta tuli tärkeä musiikissasi?*
> *AMEEBA: Niin kauan kun ihminen on osa luontoa on se oleva osa mun musiikkia tai osa kaikkea. Ihminen ei pitäs olla mitenkään erillinen entiteettinsä vaan yhtä luonnon kaa. Alkuperäiskansat ymmärtää sen mitä vieraantuneet kaupunkilaiset ei enää muista. Täällä käytetään esim. käsitteitä mennään luontoon ikäänkuin se olis joku erillinen paikka kaukana jossain, kun se pitäis olla selvää että eletään luonnon kaa symbioosissa. Luontoon ei myöskään mennä ottamaan vaan luonto antaa. […] Esim. myrskyt ja tsunamit on hienoja siitä että ihminen näkee paikkansa. Tai ehkä Luonto yrittääkin vaan saada ihmistä näkemään yhteyttä oman lajinsa kaa mikä tulee esille hetkeks katastrofin jälkeen.*
>
> (Ameeba i2017)

[44] Another interesting detail pertaining to Ameeba's New Age tendencies is the song "Atlantis" on *Kummituseläin* (Ameeba 2015c) album. Atlantis is said to have been a city under the Atlantic Ocean hosting a highly developed civilization and which some New Age groups assume will reappear with the coming "new age" (e.g. Hanegraaff 1996: 310–311, 353). The song lyrics of "Atlantis" talk about awakening and the oneness of a "higher" being and humans, using the metaphor of humans as droplets in the ocean.

Hanegraaff (1996: 95) quotes one of the prominent New Age thinkers, David Spangler, at length as Spangler describes apocalyptic belief system where corruption and materialism are about to be replaced by a new phase in human evolution, brought either by floods and other natural disasters, social upheavals or a combination of these, and finally a "new consciousness within humanity." This is remarkably similar to how Ameeba describes his music's ideology regarding nature and the emerging human connectivity above. Note also that Ameeba points to his own experience as a city dweller when referring to how people are disconnected "here," thus he is not necessarily placing himself above others.

Nature is depicted by Ameeba as clearly superior to humans, seemingly renouncing an anthropocentric worldview, but at the same time he accentuates the oneness of nature and people and the need for a balance. This kind of thinking has been present in Eastern religions for thousands of years, for example in the idea of interconnectedness in Buddhism (Samuel 1998: 133–134, 136; Kraft 1996; Kabilsingh 1996), in the worldviews of native peoples around the world including the Sámi, and has recently been adopted to Western new spirituality especially among pagan-inspired movements (Samuel 1998: 134; Hunt 2003: 139), or what Stephen J. Hunt (2003: 139) characterizes as New Age environmentalism. A central facet of this latter movement is the aim to protect the planet out of respect for its superiority vis-à-vis humans, but also, as Hunt (2003: 139) succinctly states, it entails not accepting "the premises of a society based on economic growth" nor capitalist values, but rather seeking new alternatives.[45] As Ameeba mentions above, for native peoples living in the proximity of forests and whose livelihoods depend on nature, the relationship with nature is very respectful, and even living or visiting those places is not seen to grant any special privileges to reap the benefits (Pentikäinen 1994: 9).

In spiritually oriented eco rap such as Ameeba's, ecological values and ideas intertwine with a religious worldview which contains a non-dual view of nature and humans; this view is also at the core of deep ecology (e.g. Brinkerhoff & Jacob 1999: 527; Välimäki 2015: 163). Like Julma Henri (see section 4.1.2 below), Ameeba claims that he does not represent any religion in particular and that all religions have positive and negative facets, suggesting a somewhat relativist, tolerant, and syncretic "pick-and-mix" stance where one religion may offer fulfillment as well as the next (Ameeba i2017). When I asked about the various concepts emanating from Indian religions that feature in his music, he constructs this pluralistic discourse through an

[45] Somewhat related to this, religious studies scholar Monica M. Emerich (2012) speaks of the LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) discourse which combines ecologically and socially responsible lifestyle choices and holistic spiritual awareness which (perhaps somewhat ironically) have translated into a global billion euro industry.

analogy about car enthusiasts' interest towards car brands, seemingly dismissing fundamental differences between various religions and religious concepts:

> INKA: In your songs e.g. shanti, seven chakras, Ganesha, Shiva and other religious concepts from India are mentioned. How have they become a part of your music? What do they mean to you?
> AMEEBA: I suppose they don't matter more than the same as when cars matter to someone then they talk about car brands. For me the car itself or the vehicle is more important than the brand. I don't represent any particular denomination and I'm not an expert. All of them have good things in them I believe and they all may also have things that limit that spiritual experience that people seek. [...] "no space no Shiva concrete smothers even this song masoned in(to?) the city of living death." I wanted to fictionally express a certain feeling about the current state of humankind and the repressive liminal state where there is no room to breathe and still no sign of Shiva destroying it nor creating a different kind of world.
>
> *INKA: Biiseissäsi mainitaan mm. shanti, seitsemän chakraa, Ganesha, Shiva ym. Intian uskontoihin liittyviä käsitteitä. Mistä ne ovat tulleet musiikkiisi? Mitä ne merkitsevät sinulle?*
> *AMEEBA: Ei ne kai sen enempää merkitse muuta kun sitä samaa jos jollekkin on autoilla joku merkitys niin se puhuu automerkeistä. Itelle kuitenkin se itse auto tai kulkuväline on tärkeempi kuin se merkki. En mä edusta mitään uskontokuntaa enkä ole sen koommin mikään asiantuntija. Kaikissa on mun mielestä hyviä juttuja ja kaikissa saattaa olla myös jotain mikä rajottaa sitä varsinaista hengellistä kokemusta mitä siinä tavoitellaan. […] "ei tilaa, ei Shivaa, betoni demppaa tän mun laulunkin, muurattu umpeen, elävän kuoleman kaupunki(in?)". Halusin kuvitteellisesti ilmaista tietynlaista tunnetta ihmiskunnan tän hetkisestä vaiheesta ja vallitsevasta ahdistavasta välitilasta missä ei oo tilaa hengittää eikä näy vielä Shivaa tuhoamassa sitä eikä luomassa toisenlaista maailmaa.*
>
> (Ameeba i2017)

Ameeba has mentioned on several occasions the current stage or various stages of mankind in his songs. Above, when I asked him about the various references to Indian religions in his music, including the Hindu god of destruction, Shiva, he answered by quoting the lyrics of his song "Kowloon" which was discussed above. Ameeba then connects this fictional idea to a kind of apocalyptic point of view about the spiritual evolution of the world. This idea is also at the heart of much of New Age thinking.

Pluralism in the context of this study can be defined as the belief that all religions share some core message and truth and can be considered equally valid but simply different ways of viewing the world and it is thus irrelevant which path we choose to follow. In his pluralistic thinking, Ameeba also to some extent reflects the central idea in new spirituality that authority now comes mostly from personal experience (Woodhead & Heelas 2000: 343; cf. Lynch 2007: 10). This toleration for diversity is, according to Hunt (2003: 134), one of the reasons why new spirituality (and New Age) frequently borrows core teachings from established religions. Some scholars relate religious pluralistic thinking to a larger societal process of dedifferentiation which can be conceptualized as an attempt to "find factors which unite societies, peoples and the whole of humanity" (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 19). Although Ameeba also raps of global scale problems and of Westernized societies in particular, he often emphasizes that he speaks from a personal point of view and does not aspire to preach.[46] Most of the *Apocalypto* album, as his discography as a whole, focuses on exploring his own spiritual journey and relationship to music and people.

While taking an individualistic, independent stance as regards his religious views, Ameeba uses terms from Indian religions in his lyrics, and also expresses ideas that align with non-dual strands of Hinduism and Buddhism, particularly a belief in no-self and the ego. Below, he discusses the concepts of "consciousness" and "ego" in his music:

> INKA: [In your music] you speak also e.g. about cravings, ego, consciousness; how do you understand/define these concepts?
> AMEEBA: [...]Consciousness for me is perhaps some kind of foundation and core of being human. In some contexts it may also refer to some level of understanding. I consider that I am here to experience human consciousness but I believe there are several other levels of consciousness from animals to deities [...] Ego is that dude in me who enjoys attention and in worst case takes over my humanity and due to which I lose the ability to experience depth and connection with the true self or the possibility to endless selflessness.
>
> *INKA: Puhut [musiikissasi] myös mm. haluista, egosta, tietoisuudesta; miten itse ymmärrät/määrittelet nämä käsitteet?*
> *AMEEBA: […]Tietoisuus on ehkä mulle jonkinlainen ihmisenä olemisen perusta ja ydin. Jossain yhteydessä se voi myös tarkottaa jotain ymmärtämisen tasoa.*

[46] See for example "I still did not come here to teach anyone" ("En edelleenkään tullu tänne ketään opettaa") in the song "Omen" (Ameeba 2016a). An almost identical line can be found on the same album in the song "Kapuloita rattaisiin" ("Throwing monkey wrench," Ameeba 2016a).

> *Ajattelen että mä oon täällä kokemassa ihmistietoisuutta mutta uskon että on varmasti monenlaisia muitakin tietoisuuden tasoja eläimistä jumalolentoihin. […] Ego on se jäbä mussa kuka nauttii ulkoisesta huomiosta ja pahassa tapauksessa ottaa kokonaisvallan omasta ihmisyydestä jonka johdosta kadotan kyvyn kokea syvyyttä ja yhteyden oikeeseen minään tai mahdollisuuden lopulliseen minättömyyteen.*
>
> (Ameeba i2017)

In Ameeba's description, ego becomes a concept related to non-dualism. Gordon Lynch (2007) suggests that people interested in new spirituality see the "'ego' as the superficial, socialized or false self" and are in search of an "authentic self": "Spiritual development consists of a movement beyond this false ego towards one's true self." (Lynch 2007: 58.) Similarly Teemu Taira (2006: 65) mentions the quest for an authentic self and personal spiritual growth as quintessential traits of current "self-centered" (focusing on the individual) forms of religiosity where the sacred in its various forms can be experienced in the here and now. This focus on the self makes it possible to detach from religious traditions, a trait facilitated by the loosening of societal structures (Taira 2006: 65; see also above). Hunt (2003: 139) notes that the basic assumption in New Age environmentalism is that there exists a "harmony between the individual and the cosmic order," which also connects environmental issues with personal problems. Hence, "spiritually balanced" people do not need to feel distress about nature or the planetary organism as they perceive it to be superior and sacred (Hunt 2003: 139). Generally, these ideas and beliefs draw from various sources, such as modern anticapitalism, Buddhism, and paganism (Hunt 2003: 139). Ameeba constructs a narrative which is somewhat similar to New Age environmentalism where spiritual awareness contributes positively to the cosmic order, "human consciousness" and evolution, whereas the ego may have detrimental effects.

Another frequent term used by researchers in connection with new spirituality or New Age is "self-spirituality." The vocabulary used by adherents includes such terms as "soul," "ego," "the one," "the self," "God within," "Inner reality," "the Thinker" etc. (Sutcliffe 1998: 42; Campbell 2007: 121). These kinds of terms often draw from Indian religions and are also present in Ameeba's music (and equally in Julma Henri's, see section 4.1.2). Particularly interesting is Ameeba's assertion in the above extract that the ego causes him to lose connection with his "true self" or to lose the opportunity to reach eternal selflessness. While such ideas are featured in New Age (Campbell 2007), this is nearly a text book definition of the ideas of non-dualism and enlightenment in Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism: in Advaita Vedanta, the goal is to realize that our "true self" is part of the oneness of all existence (*Atman* in *Brahman*), whereas in Buddhism the goal is to understand our selflessness (*anatta*)

as part of the fact that everything is fundamentally impermanent. Like in Ameeba's explanation, in the framework of individual new spirituality, mixing a variety of religious traditions is common.

In the song "Omen" (Ameeba 2016a) Ameeba raps: "By broadening spirituality you breathe lighter" ("leventämällä henkisyyttä kevennät sun hengitystä"). In the context of the *Apocalypto* album, then, spirituality becomes a possible solution for the environmental and consequent human problems; once this destructive pollution of capitalism and its consequences are alleviated, we are better able to breathe. When I asked about his reasons to criticize current society, he stated that it has do with human suffering and the lack of sustainability in production: mental health will also improve when people stop chasing profits (Ameeba i2017): "Material wealth will not fulfill anyone in the end" ("Materiaalinen vauraus ei lopulta tuo kellekkään tavoiteltua täyttymystä"). Ameeba's ideas about capitalism causing human suffering reflect the environmentalism mentioned above: nature, humans, and the universe are meant to live in harmony which can be achieved by understanding that "emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually balanced people do not make excessive demands on natural resources" (Hunt 2003: 139). In essence, personal and environmental issues are linked together.

Connecting this with Peter Beyer's (1998) rather broad definition of nature religion seems well-suited for characterizing the kinds of ideas that Ameeba constructs in his music. Beyer (1998: 17) lists the following features as characterizing nature religion: resistance towards religious, institutional, and political authorities; emphasis on individual religious experience and spiritual journey, and thus individual authority; spiritual value given to physical places; focus on this-worldly means for spiritual satisfaction; holism; non-hierarchical communal bonds; and optimism towards human spiritual progress. As Beyer (1998) underlines, the emphasis on these features varies, and they do not necessarily always occur together. These traits regarding nature religion are in fact listed by various religious studies scholars regarding the overall shift in (Western) religiosity. Liselotte Frisk and Peter Nynäs (2012: 50–51) summarize these features as eclecticism and syncretism, personal experience, non-institutionalism, egalitarianism (personal authority), "self-spirituality" meaning focusing on humans rather than God, and "this-worldliness." Steven Sutcliffe (1998: 40–41) mentions that in self-spirituality, supernatural features are "demythologized: emphasis is upon the immanence, even the 'naturalness,' of the divine."

Equally in Ameeba's case, the focus is often on personal spiritual journey, and holistic worldview along with strong emphasis on connecting with nature. Religious studies scholars Seil Oh and Natalia Sarkisian (2012: 303–305) point out that a holistic or a non-dual worldview drawing from Eastern philosophies which emphasizes the interconnection of all things can be thought to advance both personal

and general well-being. Ameeba also often refers to the nature/technology juxtaposition (Beyer 1998: 18) in songs such as "Laajakaista" ("Broadband," Ameeba 2015c). Beyer (1998: 18) describes this as a defining feature of nature religion where "nature is itself a counter-structural symbol [...] dominant global modernities are characterized by a priority of technical, humanly controlled and artificial constructs, so nature is all that which is not technical artifice [...]."

Considering that Ameeba's spiritual tendencies include a critique of capitalism and a demand for a more just and balanced society, his religious worldview could be characterized as this-wordly (cf. Carrette & King 2012: 65–66). For example in Buddhism, this kind of engagement entails that spiritually enlightened individuals attempt to alleviate the suffering of others (Carrette & King 2012: 66). According to Wickström and Illman (2012: 231), Christianity along with other Abrahamic faiths have often been considered as less environmentally aware than Buddhism or many other Eastern religions with more developed considerations about environmental issues. This perceived lack of engagement with the theme has "taught a generation of Western environmentalists to regard religion as a problem" (Wickström & Illman 2012: 231). Yet, at least in Finland, the so-called greening of the protestant church since the 1990s challenges this perception (Wickström & Illman 2012: 225–226). A general tendency to view Christianity as lacking environmental awareness is one potential reason why ecologically aware artists such as Ameeba choose to employ spiritual markers from Eastern and New Age traditions instead; these include namedropping such concepts and deities as chakras[47], Shiva, Shakti, and Ganesha (Ameeba 2015c; Ameeba 2016a) but also, as seen above, a reference to East Asia with "Kowloon." In the minds of globalized eco-conscious listeners, it may add credibility to Ameeba's message and image as a "hippie" rapper, as he sometimes calls himself, who is in touch with countercultural trends and ideas and understands the global dimension of environmental issues.

Indeed, this can potentially also be a generational issue, where post-Christianity manifests as mixture of spiritual traditions acquired by globalized, liberal millennials; their personal connection to spirituality through travelling, lived experiences, and readings on the subject may resonate more strongly than a fairly static church with certain image problems (such as perceived outdated attitudes towards gay marriage or female leadership). As Wickström and Illman (2012: 232) note, this dynamic of "individuality and interconnectedness" and environmentalism can offer a suitable combination in developing self-awareness and a sense of belonging. This is arguably also the identification which Ameeba offers to his

[47] The seven chakras are mentioned in his song "Puhuri" (Ameeba 2015c) and metaphorically in "Kummituseläin" ("seitsemän portin vartija," "guardian of seven gates," Ameeba 2015c).

listeners through music; utilizing few place-based markers[48] in his lyrics apart from the somewhat nonspecific forest, his stories become adaptable to many circumstances while retaining a sense of personal storytelling and intimacy, a highly regarded trait of personal-experiential hip hop authenticity. Beyer (1998: 19) asserts that nature religion is an example of a strategy of "'acting locally and thinking globally'" which is both counter-cultural and counter-structural yet aligns with the general course of globalization. While there is seemingly a "colonial binary of the materialist West and the spiritual East" (Roy 2017: 141), in Ameeba's music the connection to Finnish nature arguably deconstructs this binary, as discussed below.

Ameeba mentioned that he meditates in the forest (Ameeba i2015a; i2015b). Religious studies scholar Kenneth Kraft (1996: 486) mentions that meditation such as "mindfulness verses" or short poems about nature are sometimes used in Buddhism by individuals for remembering the interconnectedness of all beings. Meditation as a form of environmental awareness is thus meant to "reduce egoism [...] foster empathy with other beings, clarify intention, prevent [...] burnout, and ultimately lead to a profound sense of oneness with the entire universe" (Kraft 1996: 485). Also in deep ecological thinking, Eastern religious traditions and meditation are drawn from in order to reach a non-dualistic state of connection with nature and an "ecocentric worldview" (Brinkerhoff & Jacob 1999: 527–528). These descriptions are closely reminiscent of the kinds of ideas Ameeba constructs in his music and interviews (Ameeba i2017). In Ameeba's music, forest is depicted as a clean, peaceful, and quiet place for meditation with reviving effects, which follows the cultural-historical Finnish tradition where forests are places for spiritual transformation (Anttonen 1994). Meditation is referred to in the lyrics of "EKG" when Ameeba raps "close your eyes go where you see more" ("silmät sulkemalla sinne missä näät enemmän," Ameeba 2016a), and more explicitly in connection to forests in "Takaisin" ("Back," Ameeba 2015c):

[48] Two exceptions to this are a reference to Osaka (a metropolis in Japan) in his song "Takaisin" ("Back") on the album *Kummituseläin* (Ameeba 2015c), and the song "Illo" on the album *Montako puuta on metsä* (Ameeba 2012a). Illo is located in the town of Vammala, Finland, to which Ameeba has personal ties (Ameeba i2015a).

When I meditate on my moss bed
I understand more and expand

Ja kun meditoin mun sammalpedillä
Ymmärrän enemmän ja leviän

I don't need words when I return to the forest
When I am no longer afraid of silence
Back where my innermost is washed
Humbly I bow before your water

En tarvii sanoja kun palaan takas metsään
Kun en enää hiljaisuutta pelkää
Takas sinne missä sisimpäni pestään
Nöyränä polvistun sun vetesi edessä

("Takaisin" ["Back"], Ameeba 2015c)

Not only do Ameeba's lyrics often discuss meditation, accompanied by ambient and dub influenced beats, but he additionally uses adjectives on his Bandcamp page that reflect this content. Upon releasing his album *Kummituseläin* (Ameeba 2015c), the Bandcamp page included the following tags (see **Figure 2** below): hip-hop/rap, ameeba, electronic, experimental, ghettotyylit, healing & meditation, kummituseläin, newagehop, rap, alternative, rpk, underground, Helsinki. Tags are used to frame content in blogs, social media, and other web sites. These frames then direct the viewer, or in this case listener, to orient to and understand the content in a certain way but they also tell us about the artist's intentions and understanding regarding their own creations. In addition to marking Ameeba's *Kummituseläin* album as "experimental" and "underground" "electronic" rap, the tags "healing & meditation" and "newagehop" in particular are interesting here. Till (2017: 334) notes that while difficult to define, new age music draws from ambient, world music, and electronica, while Välimäki (2015: 77 fn. 13, 171) adds that new age music is derived from 1970s minimalist and spiritual music and krautrock and often focuses on conveying the stasis of meditation. In my interview (RPK i2015), RPK described new age as a genre that is "meditative hippie music" with "a zen-ideology." In this web site context, "new age" can be seen as a music genre of its own relating to rap and electronic genres. In this way, spirituality and music are discursively connected and can direct the listener's experience of Ameeba's music.

This also hints at the New Age and new spirituality influences in Ameeba's lyrics; as Partridge (2004: 177) notes, dub and ambient sounds evoke "a sense of

timelessness and space" and a "soothing atmosphere" through the use of reverb and delay in particular, and "the sonorous bass" provides a "mystical, ethereal quality" (Partridge 2004:176). This is also why these sounds and genres have been used by those wanting to make spiritual music (Partridge 2004:176), as well by composers drawing influences from Eastern religions and music cultures and by people practicing meditation, for example (Till 2017).

By name association, the tags relate to new spirituality and the various popular forms of meditation as well as New Age movement, and to a mixture of new age and hip hop genres. "Healing" also suggests that Ameeba's music has curative effects. This "healing & meditation" tag is also attached to all other Ameeba releases in Bandcamp, whereas "newagehop" only to *Kummituseläin*.

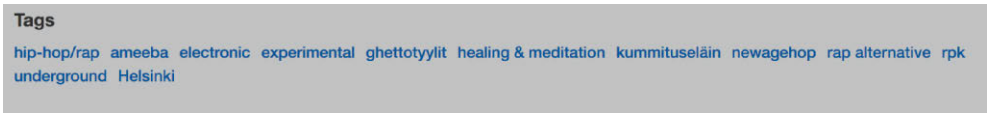

Figure 2. Tags under Ameeba's *Kummituseläin* album (Ameeba 2015c) on his Bandcamp page (Ameeba nd.).

Healing practices, such as yoga or various therapies, are a significant part of today's spiritual landscape and the idea of holistic well-being (Utriainen et al. 2012). Religious studies scholars Terhi Utriainen et al. (2012: 191) assert that "religious/spiritual and well-being practices are also political and ethical practices which people engage with in order to aim at some benefit or value in their lives: for better health, society, life, self, relations, and future." By framing his music, albeit somewhat implicitly, as healing and meditation, Ameeba also raises an ethical viewpoint in favor of spiritual practice. As "alternative" spirituality today includes a variety of books, seminars, and meditation apps among many other things, it seems natural that music would be involved in one way or another (cf. Lynch 2006: 482). It is possible to speculate to which extent Ameeba has intended his art as a vehicle for spiritual practice.

Ameeba also constructs the idea that song making might be inspired by a divine source. Artists mystifying their creative process by saying that they "channel" music is nothing new; the likes of John Lennon have stated that the music they produce just "comes" to them (Negus 1995: 328). Ameeba reiterates this idea below:

> AMEEBA: […] but the best thing [...] in song making is when it just flows from somewhere. You're in a kind of trance or zone and you don't even really have to think about it. Maybe you just channel some higher message.

> *AMEEBA: […] mut se on parasta […] biisintekemistä kun se vaan tulee jostain. Siin on semmosessa pienessä transsissa tai zonessa ja ei sitä oikeestaan tarvii ees miettiä. Ehkä siinä vaan kanavoi jotain korkeempaa viestiä.*
>
> (Ameeba i2015a)

Channeling is arguably one of the most prominent features of so-called New Age spirituality (Wood 2007: 101; Hulkkonen 2016). Hanegraaff (1996: 27) even calls New Age "to a large extent […] a religion of revelation." Channeling seemingly provides a direct link to spirits and the transcendent, uninhibited by rational mind (Brown 1997: 26). Hanegraaff (1996: 27–34) divides the types of channeling onto four[49] major categories, stressing that the boundaries of such categories are very elusive. The one which seems most suitable here in Ameeba's case is trance channeling. Also a description that several channeling mediators have shared includes merging with some sort of consciousness (Hanegraaff 1996: 33, fn. 35), which Ameeba seems to evoke above and in some of his lyrics (for example "Vanhasielu" or "Puhuri," Ameeba 2015c). Hanegraaff (1996: 252) explains that trance states are moments of "inner travels" where altered states of consciousness can be experienced. Trance channels often claim they become "vessels for spiritual intelligence" (Brown 1997: 25). One of such trance-inducing mechanisms according to Hanegraaff (1996: 252) is rhythm, which can be provided by music. In general, scholars seem to agree that music has the capacity to induce altered consciousness and trance-like states (Becker-Blease 2004: 90–91), yet it is certainly possible for musicians to describe a kind of flow state without religious terms (see Hytönen 2010). In this kind of altered state, time also becomes much more relative and subjective than our ordinary clock time (Hanegraaff 1996: 253). Trance is also commonly associated with shamanism (Brown 1997: 26; Puttick 2004: 292).

Matthew Wood (2007: 101) defines channeling as "a form of spirit possession in which the spirit is held to be a religious master of some sort [...] whose primary purpose is to deliver messages of general interest to humans regarding the current state of, and future changes to, the world and our place within it." This description is very close to Ameeba's own answer to my question about channeling:

> INKA: A few times you have mentioned channeling something (higher) when writing a song. What do you mean by channeling? How does it happen?

[49] The other three are automated channeling (such as ouija boards), clairaudient and/or clairvoyant channeling, and "open channeling" which basically means that anyone is able to channel and may consider also intuition and imagination as channeling (Hanegraaf 1996: 27–32).

> AMEEBA: I don't know any better how or what happens there. I probably act as some kind of instrument for some mystical thing between the universe's main office and humans. With higher I maybe have referenced a state of consciousness which is higher than everyday ordinary thinking. Highest is probably then nirvana state of mind... if that even has anything to do with the mind.
>
> *INKA: Olet pariin otteeseen maininnut kanavoivasi jotakin (korkeampaa) kun kirjoitat biisiä. Mitä tarkoitat kanavoinnilla? Miten se tapahtuu?*
> *AMEEBA: En tiedä sen paremmin miten tai mitä siinä tapahtuu. Toimin kai jonkinlaisena instrumenttinä jollekkin mystiselle asialle universumin päätoimiston ja ihmisten välillä. Korkeammalla olen ehkä viitannut tietoisuudentilaan joka on ylempänä yleisestä arkisesta ajatusmaailmasta. Korkein on kai sitten nirvana state of mind… jos siinä on sitten enää edes tekemistä mielen kanssa.*
>
> (Ameeba i2017)

Before this final e-mail interview (Ameeba i2017), Ameeba had had time to check and read through the transcriptions of our previous interviews, thus my question about channeling here is an effort to expand those answers. Channels are generally perceived to help people awaken from ignorance to a fuller awareness, and Ameeba implicitly suggest the same here when stating that he communicates with "the universe's main office." This idea pertains to the belief that mankind experiences various collective stages of spiritual evolution, sometimes referred to as dimensions or levels in New Age (Campbell 2007: 335–336; Brown 1997: 23), and dis- and reconnection with the divine ultimate being or truth (cf. also Wood 2007: 102–107). Ameeba's tales in his music about growth processes and surviving hardships seemingly reflect the quintessential New Age idea of spiritual development (Hanegraaff 1996). Previously in another extract in this present section, Ameeba also alluded to "levels" of "human consciousness." Many perceive channeling as being possessed by a higher entity, thus Wood (2007: 117–118) critically notes that the power relations created in such interaction (between channeler, higher being, and potential audience of the channeled message) question the prevalent idea of new spirituality as solely based on individual authority. Indeed, also in this study, the social constructivist stance assumes that the artists have not formulated their worldviews in a vacuum, despite the fact that they do not mention any individual religious groups or communities in their songs or interviews.

The ideas brought forth by Ameeba bring to mind Linda Woodhead's (2001: 81–82) characterization of new spirituality (mentioned in section 3.2.2), specifically that this type of spirituality contains views of "everyday or phenomenal reality as a manifestation of a deep and unifying spirit or life-force [...]." Also Arthur Versluis

(2014: 181) upon his discussion of immediatism asserts that in new spirituality, the "truth" is available not through practice alone but by "divine grace" revealing itself. In other words, the connection between Ameeba's music making process and his spirituality is essentially in how he believes the spiritual message gets delivered, while he also stresses that this is his individual experience.

Although Hanegraaff (1996: 25) laments that the term "inspiration" has become too closely associated with secular contexts for it to function for discussion about New Age, it is fitting here. In Ameeba's description, the channeling, or in this case musical inspiration, could be considered as spontaneous rather than intentional (cf. Hanegraaff 1996: 30–33), as when he described how he became inspired when he was writing a song with rapper Áilu Valle (Ameeba i2015b). The kind of flow state he referred to helped him produce verses easily, almost without thinking, thus he concluded that "perhaps you act as a kind of mediator [...] catalyst of worldpain" ("ehkä siinä kuitenki sitte toimii jonkinlaisena välittäjänä […] maailmantuskan katalysaattorina," Ameeba 2015b). Based on the connection made between consciousness and channeling, it seems that Ameeba considers his writer's block to be the result of a blockage in his channeling abilities; "it" (channeled consciousness) stops giving him material for his lyrics (Ameeba 2015b).

Like Julma Henri, Ameeba also expresses pluralism. This is entirely compatible with Ameeba's nature oriented spirituality, as respect for nature – which is at the core of Ameeba's spirituality – is a question dealt with in most if not all religious denominations and is characteristic of New Age environmentalism. This is evident in the lyrics of "Monet tiet" ("Many roads," Ameeba 2016a) where Ameeba lists religious figures from Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism for example:

> They argue about road signs
> For the other it's Christ, for the other Allah
> For one it's Buddha for a few Tao
> For someone Krishna, for someone Amma
> Mother Earth highest space water human
> Shiva Jehova tantra sun life karma cosmos
> Whichever you give your faith to
>
> *Ne riitelee tienviitoista*
> *Toiselle Kristus toiselle Allah*
> *Yhdelle Buddha parille Tao*
> *Jollekin Krishna jollekin Amma*
> *Äiti Maa korkein avaruus vesi ihminen*
> *Shiva Jehova tantra aurinko elämä karma kosmos*
> *Mille ikinä sun uskos annat*

There's no single right there's no single wrong
Everyone on their own path navigating towards the same destination
No single right no single wrong
Without love navigating towards the same destination

Ei olemas yhtä oikeeta ei olemas yhtä väärää
Jokainen omalla tiellään navigoidaan samaa määränpäätä
Ei yhtä oikeeta ei yhtä väärää
Vailla rakkautta navigoidaan samaa määränpäätä

("Monet tiet" ["Many roads"], Ameeba 2016a)

In the above lyrics, Ameeba further states that there is no right or wrong in different religious worldviews. He constructs a pluralistic stance while connecting it with nature references, such as water and sun, but also with cosmic space and "Mother Earth." Indeed, this song is an illustrative example of Ameeba's "New Age" nature religion and pluralism, the combination of which constitutes a worldview where the cosmic order of things connects us all in the end. Based on the analysis of this section, it can be stated that Ameeba draws from and shares similarities with a variety of strands within the history of new spirituality. This mixture of beliefs and ideas aligns with religious studies theories about the individuality and syncretism of current Western worldviews.

The next section discusses Eastern influences and pluralistic ideas in Julma Henri's expression.

4.1.2 Julma Henri's pluralism

In relation to Julma Henri's music and views, I wish to highlight Versluis' (2014: 229–230) observation about contemporary spiritual thinkers: many of them have shifted or oscillate between "Buddhistish" and Neo-Advaitin world views. In the former, drawing from Zen Buddhism in particular, the emphasis tends to be more on meditation, whereas the Advaita Vedanta worldview is more focused on spiritual realization through self-inquiry. Julma Henri's worldview also appears to oscillate between these two worldviews, and he has frequently expressed pluralistic views; hence this section focuses on these aspects.

The tendency of mixing the two distinct but non-dual Indian philosophical traditions, (Zen) Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, is somewhat common in Western new spirituality as discussed in the theory section of this study (3.2.2). This is also visible in the lyrics of the rap artists which this study focuses on. Known thinkers and spiritual teachers in this non-dual vein include for example Krishnamurti,

Eckhart Tolle, Adyashanti, Nisargadatta Maharaj, and Ramana Maharshi (Versluis 2014). Krishnamurti and Tolle also came up in my interviews with Julma Henri.[50] Particularly the content on Julma Henri's *"Henri"* album (Julma Henri & RPK 2011), which was inspired to a large extent by his journey to India, draws from Eastern religions and ideas often present in new spirituality, such as losing your ego and no longer associating your "true" self with anything other than universal consciousness. This is a common ideal in Buddhism, Hinduism's Advaita Vedanta, and among many abovementioned non-dualist figures associated with new spirituality. In this section, my aim is to draw attention to both the "original" teachings in Hinduism and Buddhism as well their influence and application in new spirituality and how they manifest in Julma Henri's expression. The discussion may at times seem confusing: as stated, this vagueness and syncretism is, however, characteristic of the kind of new spirituality the artists appear to draw from.

For example the song "Kutsu" ("The Call") from the *"Henri"* album (Julma Henri & RPK 2011) constructs non-dual ideas through references to a "true" self, as the oneness seemingly "calls" Julma Henri to realize this:

> Why won't you face me
> Why wouldn't you become me
> Why do you identify with your mind
> Why won't you face your true self
>
> *Miksi et kohtaa minua*
> *Miksi et tulisi minuksi*
> *Miksi samaistut mieleesi*
> *Mikset kohtaa todellista minuuttasi*
>
> ("Kutsu" ["The Call"], Julma Henri & RPK 2011)

Julma Henri claims that Buddhism has been a particularly significant source of inspiration for him (see interview extract further below). However, the lyrics of the self-titled *"Henri"* album's opening song "Kutsu" appear to reference the idea

[50] Christopher Partridge (2004: 109) notes that not only Indian or Eastern thought is non-dual, hence it would be misleading to speak only of "Eastern" influences when speaking of non-dualism. However, in the context of the present study, the artists' non-dualism seems to have mostly Hindu and Buddhist origins. Monotheistic religions have also had their fair share of mystics seeking a union with God or the cosmos (created by God) during their history, and on the other hand, there are plenty of dualist philosophical and religious strands of thought among Eastern religions, such as the Samkhya school in Hinduism.

of Atman in Brahman (oneness) and self-inquiry technique pertaining to Hinduism. Indeed, the fact that the *"Henri"* album was named after the artist himself suggests that the songs consist of internal reflections. Self-inquiry in Hinduism entails epistemological reflection about the nature of reality by focusing attention to ourselves (Davis 2010: xvii). The sacred Hindu scriptures, Upanisads, describe Brahman as "the infinite" and Atman as the Self: "knowledge of Brahman liberates the seeker," in other words enlightenment is available when we understand this "true reality" of things (Rambachan 2006: 32). The lyrics above appear to describe Brahman speaking to Atman, trying to break the state of ignorance and illusion that we are separate from the infinite "limitless awareness" (Rambachan 2006: 45) and thus to make us understand the nature of the "true self" (see also Davis 2010: 126).

According to the Advaita philosophy, Atman, the I, is often erroneously equated with the mind, and here Julma Henri constructs this idea as well. This state of ignorance, falsely thinking that the self Atman is separate from the infinite Brahman, also causes fear of losing our identity (the self), which Julma Henri depicts here in the form of questions. The enlightened or liberated self understands that the true self is non-dual. Although (Mahayana) Buddhism shares the idea of fundamental non-duality of all existence with Advaita Vedanta, it also has the doctrine of no-self (*anatta*) (see e.g. Davis 2010) which does not seem compatible with the idea in this particular song. As Davis (2010: 72) explains, in Mahayana Buddhism "[n]o-self is not only the denial of a substantial, fixed entity we call the self but also a recognition of the self and reality as processes." Thus the idea that there is some "true self" as in the lyrics above does not fit within the general Buddhist framework of impermanence. However, in Zen Buddhism the idea of a "true self" has been used to describe on the one hand the belief that everyone is capable of enlightenment and thus possesses "Buddha nature," and on the other that the no-self *is* the true self (Behn King 1984). This has been translated into immediatism and other strands of new spirituality where enlightenment is seen to just happen or that we are already enlightened and thus there is nothing that needs to be done (Versluis 2014: 228–229).

Perhaps not coincidentally, there is a song called "Yksi" ("One") on this same *"Henri"* album (Julma Henri & RPK 2011). It further underscores that the true self is not equivalent to our experiences or our name (cf. Rambachan 2006: 33) and liberation awaits once this is realized:

> There would be no seer
> There would only be the seen
> One

Ei olisi olemassa tarkkailijaa
Olisi olemassa vain se mitä tarkkaillaan
Yksi

Ignorance state of confusion
Is the origin of your suffering
Its fault is your inability to live
Through controlling the senses
You will perceive directly when you know
The difference between perceiver and medium of perceiving
You differentiate between the mind and truth
Discarding wanting and clinging
Finally you will receive freedom

Tietämättömyys hämmennyksen tila
On kärsimyksesi alkuperä
Sen syytä on kyvyttömyytesi elää
Aistien hallinnan avulla
Havaitset suoraan kun tunnet
Havaitsijan ja havaitsemisvälineen välisen eron
Erotat mielen ja totuuden
Halun ja riippuvuuden hyläten
Viimein saat käsiisi vapauden

("Yksi" ["One"], Julma Henri & RPK 2011)

The lyrics for "Yksi" above can be seen to reflect a non-dual philosophy suitable for both Buddhist and Hindu worldviews with their ideas about seeing or perceiving the difference between "the mind and truth" and achieving freedom by "discarding wanting." Julma Henri mentioned he wrote the *"Henri"* album entirely in India and originally planned to also record it in India, where according to him similar thoughts as can be found on the album are very much present (Julma Henri i2017). Julma Henri underscored, however, that he had been researching and exploring various religions and philosophies already before which also contributed to his thinking (Julma Henri i2017). Julma Henri has released several songs dealing with the idea of "oneness" (non-dualism) of the universe or a universal consciousness. From a non-dual viewpoint, dualism is considered an illusion, or as formulated in these lyrics, a "state of confusion." Davis (2010: xiii) outlines that according to Zen Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, dualistic understanding "does not give us true or

direct knowledge of 'the nature of things'," in other words of the fundamentally non-dual reality.

Above, Julma Henri appears to reference two of the four so-called Noble Truths[51] in Buddhism, that the root cause of all suffering is craving and we need to remove it in order to achieve enlightenment ("freedom"). The lyrics also reference the "seer," a central working concept in Advaita Vedanta alternately called "knower," "thinker" etc.: through deconstructive self-inquiry, it is possible to realize that when focusing attention, the "seer" is the Self, Atman in Brahman, and always present in all things (Davis 2010: 21). When realizing that any subject-object separation such as "seer" and "seen" is false, non-dual understanding and thus liberation ensues. Brahman cannot be an object which is perceived, and because Atman is already part of Brahman, it cannot be the object, either (see Davis 2010: 23) – thus all there is left is the non-dual Self. This is the process that the lyrics above seemingly attempt to explain: that our "true" consciousness, the Self, is always already part of the "One," and we can give up concepts such as the "seer" once we understand this. The Advaita philosophy posits that it is possible to understand all of this when "perceiving directly" instead of identifying the Self with the mind, senses, or other transient objects of awareness (Rambachan 2006: 35–36, 57–58): above, Julma Henri raps "you differentiate between the mind and truth" and "through controlling the senses you will perceive directly."

Julma Henri stated that Euro Crack's music was a clear continuation of his *"Henri"* album (Euro Crack i2015), as his lyrics contained similar themes. This is perhaps most visible in his verse in Euro Crack's song "Oleniikuolet" (Euro Crack 2013a). The Finnish name of the song is a double entendre: "Be as you are" or "Be so you die." In addition to the Euro Crack duo, the song also featured Khid, Ameeba, and Finnish underground rapper Lommo. In his lyrics, Julma Henri illustrates the "true" self, the consciousness or awareness, and its separate function from the ego, the subconscious, and the intellect:

> My body is my ride senses are windows
> Intellect as driver on the backseat me
> Meaning consciousness vibing quietly in the background eyeing everything
> It's not the bass causing the vibrations
> The whole fucking car body vibrating as soon as
> The hidden subconscious yells from the trunk
> It suggests comments even intellect doesn't always get
> Those prattles snarls indistinct bawls

[51] The other two truths are that life consists of suffering, and that the eightfold path is the road towards enlightenment (the method for ending suffering).

And in the other front seat bossing around sitting belted
Crammed there it's the ego now it's trying to tell the driver
Who we are where we're from
What we want what we don't want
Trying to make us believe in itself
Freeze and cling
Its stuff arises from memory
Shut up all of you!

Mun kroppa on mun kiesi ikkunoita aistit
Äly on kuski takapenkil meitsi
Eli tietosuus fiilistelee taustalla kaikkee hiljaa katselee
Se ei oo basso mikä värinän tekee
Helevetin kori värisee heti
Ku takakontista piilosta huutaa alitajunta
Se ehdottelee kommentoi ei välillä älykään ymmärrä noit
Turinoit örinöit epämääräsii ölinöit
Ja toises etupenkis määräilee istuu vöis
Siihen on tunkenu ego nyt se yrittää kuskille kertoo
ketä me ollaan mistä me tullaan
mitä me halutaan mitä ei haluta
Yrittää saada itseensä uskomaan
Jähmettymään ja takertumaan
Muistista sen jutut kumpuaa
Turpa kiinni koko porukka!

("Oleniikuolet" ["Be as you are"], Euro Crack 2013a)

The idea of the ego is prominent in these lyrics: the ego is trying to get the consciousness and mind to cling to its false sense of self (separation from the infinite). In broader new spirituality or New Age terms, as Lynch (2007: 58) succinctly puts, "[s]piritual development consists of a movement beyond this false ego towards one's true self." Thus the consciousness, the "true" self ("me," "meitsi" in Finnish), described as the seer ("eyeing everything"), tells the ego, the mind (subconscious, intellect), and senses to be quiet with all the nonsense emanating from them.

The double entendre in the name of the "Oleniikuolet" song, "be as you are" or "be so you die," is likely intentional. The former version of the song name might be interpreted as a direct translation of the Zen Buddhist *shikantaza* or Advaita philosophies of "be as you are" (Davis 2010: 175). In Advaita, this idea has been

advocated especially by Ramana Maharshi, meaning that non-dual existence is always already realized, and does not necessitate any action. Shikantaza is a deconstructive meditation practice of "just sitting" (Davis 2010: 9). The latter, "be so you die," may be interpreted as a reference to an immediatist version of the enlightenment idea (in Hinduism called *moksa* or liberation, the realization that the self is one with Brahman), overcoming one's ego, its fear of death, and becoming immortal. In many neo-Advaita strands and other forms of new spirituality drawing particularly from Hinduism and Buddhism, it is often emphasized that there is nothing you can actively do (for example study sacred scriptures) to reach enlightenment. Versluis (2014) calls this immediatism. This way of thinking expresses a certain amount of passivity: either the "awakening" happens or not, and in this way, it differs from the kind of New Age evolutionary ideas of actively working towards something (Versluis 2014: 162–163) which Ameeba sometimes constructs. The song name, then, can be seen to suggest this passivity: the death of ego and enlightenment can be reached just by being, but at the same time it is necessary to silence the "prattle" of the ego to be able to reach liberation.

Besides these non-dual ideas, Julma Henri has in some songs implied that all religious paths lead to the same destination. He also discussed this pluralistic idea during our interview when I asked him to describe the worldview in his music:

> JULMA HENRI: Well it [the worldview in the music] doesn't really fit into any religions [...]. I think they [religions] are all in the end that same stuff just from different angles. And some are [...] kind of twisted religions because it has. Passed through so many people that the message has become distorted and. [...]
> INKA: What is that message?
> JULMA HENRI: Well in Christianity there's a lot of good stuff but then. From that they manage to twist it into something sick. […] Somehow they cling onto some text and start executing that. There's no pragmatism or situational understanding or such. Individual stuff. But yeah I can't really connect that with any religion stuff it's gone [...] from one end to the other and.

> *JULMA HENRI: No ei se [musiikin maailmankatsomus] oikeen istu mihinkään niihin uskontoihin […]. Mun mielestä ne kaikki on kuitenki loppujen lopuks sitä sammaa juttua vaan eri näkökulmista. Ja osa on […] silleen vinksahtaneita uskontoja koska se on. Menny niin monen ihmisen suun kautta vääristyny se viesti ja. […]*
> *INKA: Mikä se on se viesti?*
> *JULMA HENRI: No onhan jossaki kristinuskossaki paljon tosi hyviä juttuja mut. Siitäki saahaa väännettyä ihan joku sairas juttu. […] Jotenki takerrutaan johonki tekstiin ja aletaan suorittaa sitä ja. Ettei oo semmosta pragmaattisuutta*

ja tilannetajua. Ommaa juttua. Mutta joo emmä voi sitä kyllä sitoa mihinkään uskontohommiin että se on tullu […] mentyä laiasta laitaan ja.

(Julma Henri i2017)

Julma Henri criticizes Christianity and particularly "clinging" to religious texts without taking into consideration individual needs. He suggests that finding a personalized, situational interpretation is better than following dogma which leads to distorting the religious core message. Frisk and Nynäs (2012: 52) attribute this pluralistic relativist stance to postmodern Western tendency to mix religions, but favouring Indian, Chinese, and native religious influences: "eclecticism also gives rise to an extreme tolerance: if all religions are relative, they are all equally true. Futher, this characteristic undermines religions such as Christianity, which claim to have a particular truth." Yet, also Christianity has emphasized humane values throughout history, and nowadays the Church has become less strict with rule obedience while underscoring social justice and solidarity (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 29). Also Julma Henri acknowledges this, but frames these ideas as the core message in all religions:

INKA: When you stated that all these religions are [...] the same stuff but that it has just become distorted somehow. Along the way. But what is it that has become distorted?
JULMA HENRI: Well it's that kind of compassion and empathy and love that's like the core of them all. That's what it is. […]. And justice. That's where social work came from too, like from Christianity. And [...] from kindness and like helping others.

INKA: Ku sä sanoit että nää kaikki uskonnot on […] sitä samaa juttua mutta että se on vaan vääristyny jotenki. Matkalla. Mutta siis mikä se on se mikä on vääristyny?
JULMA HENRI: No kyllähän se on semmosta myötätuntoa ja empatiaa ja rakkautta se kaikkien niitten ydin. Sitähän se on. […] Ja oikeudenmukasuutta. Siittähän koko sosiaalityöki on syntyny, kristinuskosta tyyliin. Ja […] siittä hyvyydestä ja semmosesta että autetaan vaikka.

(Julma Henri i2017)

Here, Julma Henri repeats the idea that the core of all religions is the same but the angles vary. In new spirituality and New Age, the idea of universal oneness as love is recurrent (Hanegraaff 1996: 297–299), and Hanegraaff (1996: 299) points out that in New Age, compassion and helping others is tightly connected with the idea of

love.[52] The pluralistic idea that all religions "provide access" to the same core knowledge is also common in New Age as this stance also fits the narrative of universal oneness (Hanegraaff 1996: 328) and esotericism more generally (Hammer 2004: 447). This characterizes the relativism and individualism in such thinking: individuals have different paths to attain the same truth but the paths are equally valid as long as the premise is personal experience and not dogma (Hanegraaff 1996: 329). The distortion referred to by Julma Henri is perceived to be rooted in institutionalized religions; in the previous extract above, he describes how clinging to written texts obscures this message as it increases the distance to individual experience. Additionally, in the previous extract he asserted that the worldview of his music is not connected to any specific "religion stuff," suggesting a syncretistic and individualistic approach.

Pluralistic thinking has occurred across religions before, but Hinduism and Buddhism in particular have early on proposed such ideas (Runzo 2011: 63). Also Julma Henri attaches his pluralism to Indian philosophies. During an interview, he recounted his experiences in Kolkata, India, and how finding out about historical pluralistic views was an exciting experience (Julma Henri i2015).

> JULMA HENRI: [...] Radhakrisnan in Kolkata sometime maybe in early 1900s [...] had advocated this moral view that all roads lead to the same place and all are viewpoints to the same thing. Like he had invited representatives of all different religions and scientists and everyone, they had this big conference thing there and all kinds of celebrities. When I was there I found this book of minutes where [...] they wrote about the events and speeches. Really cool that this kind of [laughs] event had taken place here! And I was all like this is how this thing is! And somehow it felt to me really peculiar because usually we're very much like in our own sect and this is the stuff and everyone else is some tradition that they follow and like try to keep it clean.
>
> *JULMA HENRI: […] Radhakrisnan siellä Kolkatassa joskus tuhatyheksän sattaa luvun alkupäässä […] oli sillon mainostanu semmosta moralistista näkemystä että kaikki tiet vie sammaan mestaan ja kaikki silleen on näkökulmia samaan asiaan. Et se oli kutsunu sinne kaikkia eri uskontojen edustajia ja kaikkia tiedemiehiä ja kaikkia, siel oli hirveet konferenssit ollu ja kaikkia kuuluisuuksia. Ku olin siellä mää löysin sellasen kokouskirjan jossa […] kerrottiin sitte tapahtumista ja puheenvuoroista. Tosi siisti juttu että tämmöne [naurahtaa] on ollu täällä! Ja sitte mä olin aivan että näinhän tämä on tämä homma! Ja jotenki*

[52] See also Versluis (2014: 244) who notes that in Mahayana Buddhism, "expression of that [no-self] insight through wisdom is at the same time compassion for others."

> *se tuntu ittelle tosi erikoiselta koska yleensähän ollaan hyvin siinä omassa lahkossa ja tää on tää juttu ja kaikki muut on jotaki perinnettä jota seurataan ja silleen pyritään pitää se puhtaana.*
>
> (Julma Henri i2015)

Based on the above as well as some of his lyrics, Julma Henri's pluralist views appear to draw particularly from such formulations as put forward by Sarvepalli Radhakrisnan, an Advaita Vedanta spokesman, academic, philosopher, and former Indian president. In *Hindu View of Life* (1927: 32), Radhakrisnan states that "Hinduism accepts all religious notions as facts and arranges them in the order of their more or less intrinsic significance [...] polytheism of the masses and the uncompromising monotheism of the classes are for the Hindu the expressions of one and the same force at different levels." Albeit classifying Hinduism above other religions, Radhakrishnan and also another important Advaita Vedanta modernizer, Vivekananda, consider all religions to share the core message of oneness (Smart 1998: 81; Klostermaier 1998: 133, 153). It is likely that the event Julma Henri references discovering was in fact the World Congress of Faiths held in London in July 1936 which Radhakrishnan attended as a speaker alongside a variety of representatives of different religions.

At the same time, Julma Henri recognizes the general tendency of religions towards sectarianism, where each group claims to hold the fundamental truth and tradition and others are accused of heresy. It seems Julma Henri has been fascinated by the pluralist approach and its inclusiveness, which then transpired also into his music, as we discussed together in interviews and as he has also admitted in other media interviews (e.g. Hurula 2010). Further, Julma Henri mentioned that during his brief time in India, he was struck by how "mainstream" this kind of religious thinking was; according to religious studies scholar Klaus Klostermaier (1998: 3), Hindus are "arguably the most intensely religious people in the world."

Yet, during our discussion in 2017, Julma Henri declared Buddhism to have been the most appealing tradition for him, although he has also spent time looking into Christianity, as he explains below:

> JULMA HENRI: [...] Well it's probably gone in stages. Like there are recognizable different orientations here and there where I've been and when. It's difficult for me to categorize it [...]. Christianity I've studied like that. Then Buddhism, then the Yogasutras. What else. Then all kinds of philosophies and all kinds of folly. [...] All those meditation related things and. Yes. But I don't [...] know these different schools and strands of thought and such that I could single out my own, like I'm here and there and. [...]

INKA: How like, have you then become interested in something like I want to read that book or this guy's? How did that go about?
JULMA HENRI: Well I guess it's originally been a longing for something. And then like maybe I've come to the conclusion that. I don't know about Christianity though what I could've been searching for there but. Probably it's been a longing for some thing. But then concerning Buddhism. There it was an instant thing like yes. This is it and everything else is shit type [of thing].

JULMA HENRI: […] No se on varmaan silleen vaiheissa menny. Että on tunnistettavissa eri suuntauksia sieltä täältä millo on ollu missäki vaiheessa. Hankala mun on siihe nyt jotaki leimaa lyyä päälle että mikä se on […]. Oon mä kristinuskoa sillä lailla tutkiskellu. Sitte oon buddhalaisuutta, sitte oon noita joogasutria. Mitähän muuta. Sitte kaikenmaailman filosofioita ja kaikenlaista hömppää. […] Kaikkia niitä meditaatioon liittyvää juttua. Kyllä. Mut emmä […] tunne sitä tälleen näitä koulukunta ja ajattelusuuntauksia ja muita et mä osaisin yksilöiä sen oman, että mää oon tässä ja tuossa ja. […]
INKA: Miten sä oot sit aina kiinnostunu jostain asiasta et hei mä haluun lukee ton kirjan tai ton tyypin? Miten se on menny?
JULMA HENRI: No kai se on ollu alun perin joku kaipuu johonkin. Ja sitten on ehkä todennu et sitä. Emmä kyllä siitä kristinuskosta tiiä että mitä mä oon sieltä voinu hakea mutta. Varmaan ollu kaipuu johonki juttuun. Mut siihen buddhalaisuuteen liittyen ni. Siinä oli semmonen instant juttu et kyllä. Tämä on tämä juttu ja kaikki muut on paskaa tyyppinen.

(Julma Henri i2017)

Davis (2010) argues that the core philosophies of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism are nearly identical. This may or may not be one reason why Julma Henri seemingly features traits from both traditions in his music; Eastern philosophies more generally are frequently mixed to varying degrees in contemporary new spirituality with differences in emphases (Versluis 2014) and individuals further pick-and-mix these different traditions according to their personal needs and interests. Julma Henri also mentions having studied multiple sources, including the Yogasutras which are Hindu aphoristic literature authored by Patanjali aiming at providing liberation (from suffering and rebirth) (Klostermaier 1998: 98). Yogasutras also speak about oneness and attaining it through various exercises that help quiet the mind, and about practicing various ethical ideas such as non-violence (Klostermaier 1998: 98–101). Julma Henri's religious evolution then seemingly finished with a critical attitude towards Christianity and embracing Buddhism, but his narrative description suggests that he has rather picked and mixed various traditions instead of discarding them

completely. Also my analysis above regarding some of his lyrics supports this interpretation of syncretism. A central idea often attached to postmodernity is the absence of unequivocal truths, and a "de-differentiated society" where social and cultural divisions erode and people may utilize cultural resources of their choice, picking and mixing (Hunt 2003: 134). This is also then visible in new spirituality, and very often in the form of pluralism, syncretism, and as tolerance towards others' religious views. This seems to be visible also in Julma Henri's views.

Julma Henri speaks of a "longing" above, which is reminiscent of "spirituality of seeking," an important aspect of new spirituality and New Age (Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999; Campbell 2007: 352–353; Sutcliffe 2013: 30–32; Taves & Kinsella 2013: 84). Religious studies scholar Robert Wuthnow (1998: 5) characterizes this form of religiosity as obscuring the border between secular and sacred, individual and collective, spiritual and rational. Wuthnow (1998: 2) also emphasizes the pick-and-mix aspect of contemporary spiritual life where everyone carves their own way (see also Roof 1999). Wuthnow's analysis seems suitable here as Julma Henri more recently explained that he has attained a slightly more secularized attitude, and although practicing meditation, achieving enlightenment or the (Buddhist) selflessness (being without a personality) is not his goal. (Julma Henri i2017.) Julma Henri stressed that he has left behind the more intense times of spiritual reflection and analysis, and now focuses more on this-wordliness in life and in his music, stating that he has left out "that conscious stuff" and focused on "experiencing and living" ("jättäny [...] tiedostavan homman pois [...] keskittyny [...] kokemiseen ja elämiseen"; Julma Henri i2017).

When we discussed his songs "Väärät profeetat" and "Kuka Muu Muka 2," which comment on the pop rappers Cheek and Elastinen, the content of their music, and the music industry, Julma Henri stated that he considered the content of these songs to be "factual." He then related this to his will to move away from spiritual content in his music towards more this-wordly topics and what he sees around him: "I want to come out of my head and that consciousness stuff [...] like be right here" ("haluan tulla pois sieltä omasta päästäni ja niistä tietoisuusjutuista [...] niinku olla tässä"). It is true that his music (see Julma H 2015; Julma H 2016; Julma Henri & Sairas T 2018) has become more secular in content after the release of Euro Crack's *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a), focusing more on narrating political and interpersonal issues rather than spiritual ideas. Due to lack of space, this study however focuses mostly on this more spiritually oriented material.

In the next section, I analyze Khid's atheism as a worldview and as a tool for criticizing hip hop's authenticity discourse.

4.1.3 Khid's atheism

In addition to his song "Ateisti" ("Atheist," Khid 2016a) for example, Khid has discussed his atheism in my interviews (Khid i2015; Khid i2016). Kimmo Kääriäinen et al. (2005: 135) suggest that especially young Finnish men under the age of 35, a demography which Khid belonged to also for the duration of my research, tend to be less religious than average Finns. However, Khid has made use of both spiritual and atheistic influences in his music: he admits that spiritual aesthetics and themes were present on his album *Ei* ("No," produced by RPK, 2014) and that his views are now characterized by atheism, perhaps most visible on his solo album *Ohi* ("Past," Khid 2016a). Hunt (2002: 19) observes that the contemporary (Western) religious pluralism and pick-and-mix belief with its personal freedom has created a situation where "one can choose one's religion [...][and] choose to disbelieve"; also my view in this study is that individuals can fluxtuate between secular and religious views. In Khid's case, this has resulted in music portraying both religious and atheistic ideas. This section dissects some of these discursive ideas in his music and interviews, contextualizing them with relevant theories about Western (non-)religious individualism. Atheism has been a notable aspect of music in the West as well as outside it (Bertagnolli 2013), yet it seems little research has been conducted on explicitly atheistic musical expressions.

As stated before, there are multiple atheisms, and my attempt here is to analyze some of the different traits visible in Khid's expression. Starting from the umbrella definition for atheism as "absence of" suggested by sociologist of religion Stephen Bullivant (2013: 14),[53] it can be observed that Khid defines his views through opposition, what his views are not or are no longer, which is typical of positive atheism (Bullivant 2013: 18). In Khid's case, his worldview, the spiritual and atheistic aesthetics in his music, and personal-experiental authenticity intertwine, creating complex, multifaceted and ambiguous instances of discursive expression.

According to Khid, his first album *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) under the Khid artist persona (after having made music previously mainly as DJ Kridlokk) is a concept album which he had devised well before the album was actually made. He describes the album below and claims that the album was closely knit with a certain time and mental state in his life:

> KHID: Ei album […]it's a kind of album that I don't really underwrite anymore. It's kind of so different or I have been a different person back then. And my view

[53] As Bullivant (2013: 15) points out, this definition through "absence" aims to be neutral in the sense that it does not suggest that atheism lacks something or is otherwise inferior to a religious worldview.

> of the world and things have been different. And [...] on that album there's a lot of certain kind of spirituality that I don't underwrite anymore. Or like for me it has changed, I was never, I've never been religious. Or not so much spiritual but conscious like all people are. But like on that album for example. I do use the word soul a lot which is like I'm even annoyed that I use that word. Because I don't believe in soul […][I]'d kind of like to somehow use words in a way that they mean what they mean in dictionary form so then I've realized that soul is [...] in my worldview it's a thing that isn't based on factual reality. So then when that album has a lot of those things that have been important to me and current and real when it was made. And I've even been happy that those things were left in there with that album that I didn't have to bring all that to this day. That I'd still be that same person. Because I do want to somehow. Like even though humans are silly I'd like to think that we all develop along the way towards one direction or another or evolve.
>
> *KHID: Ei-levy […] sehän on semmone levy mitä mä en oikeen ees allekirjota enää. Se on niin tavallaan eri tai et mä oon ollu eri ihminen sillon. Ja mun näkemys maailmasta ja asioista on ollu erilaisii. Ja […] sillä levyllä on paljon semmosta tietynlaist hengellisyyttä jota mä en allekirjota enää. Tai sillee et mulla [on] muuttunu, mä en ollu ikinä, en oo ikinä ollu uskovainen. Tai ehkä niinkää hengellinen, mutta henkinen niinku kaikki ihmiset on. Mut et tolla levyllä esimerkiks. Mähän käytän paljon sanaa sielu joka on semmonen et mua jopa harmittaa et mä käytän sitä sanaa. Koska emmä usko sieluun […][T]avallaan et mä haluisin käyttää sanoja niin että ne tarkottaa mitä ne tarkottaa sanakirjamuodos ni sit mä oon tajunnu et sielu on […] mun maailmankatsomuksessa semmonen asia mikä ei oo faktoihin perustuvaa todellisuutta. Ni sitten ku siin levyssä on paljon semmosii asioita jotka on ollu mulle tärkeitä ja ajankohtasii ja oikeita sillon kun sen on tehny. Ja mä oon jopa ihan fiiliksissä et ne asiat on jääny sinne sen levyn kanssa et mun ei oo tarvinnu tuoda kaikkee sitä tähän päivään. Et mä olisin edelleen se sama ihminen. Koska sit kyl mä haluun jotenki. Tavallaan niin hölmö ku ihminen onki ni must ois ihan kiva ajatella että kaikki me kuitenkin kehitytään matkan varrella suuntaan tai toiseen tai jalostutaan.*
>
> (Khid i2015)

Here, Khid describes *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) as an album he doesn't "underwrite" anymore, explaining that his worldviews have changed since he wrote the lyrics to the songs on that record. On the one hand, Khid seemingly regrets having used explicitly spiritual language and spiritual concepts in his lyrics (and to some extent also having featured on other artists' songs with similar content, as explained

below), yet on the other hand he acknowledges that such ideas had a significant role in his life at the time and he is content that he made music which reflects this. Khid essentially asserts that he translates his personal views into his music as an artist, and in this way, his music follows his own trajectory. He constructs a discourse of musical authenticity where the artist should be able to stand behind the ideas and worldviews they express in their music, and thus should use "exact" terms in life and in music to describe these. Speers (2014: 172) notes that one issue arising from being authentic and honest in music is that it may cause distress later on when those views have changed. Naturally, we cannot draw a direct link between what Khid says have been his personal views and the developments in his music; nonetheless, he constructs these two as having strong interaction, evoking a discourse of personal-experiential authenticity.

As stated before, atheism does not exist without an object (religion, spirituality, supernatural) it positions itself against (Hyman 2010: xviii). In the interview extract above, Khid expresses regret about having used the word "soul" in his music and, as will be seen later in this section, he connects the concept with Christianity. Here, he calls soul as something non-factual, thus placing it as part of a belief system rather than in the category of naturally occurring things. Naturalism and atheism are strongly interconnected: atheism frequently features the belief that there is nothing other than naturally occurring phenomena which can be explained in physico-chemical terms (Bullivant 2013: 19). Asserting that the soul is a subjective matter of faith rather than objectively existing entity constructs Khid the artist as an atheist and his *Ei* ("No") album, which contains the word, as religious. Yet, the name of the album, a negative expressing denial, can be read as an atheistic stance towards certain worldviews such as hip hop authenticity (see subchapters 5.3 and 6.2) and spirituality. Additionally, his atheism appears first and foremost to be a critique of religion; atheism as a worldview may consist of either simple non-belief or also a criticism of religions (Sillfors 2017: 3). While believing in the existence of a soul is certainly possible for an atheist (e.g. Sillfors 2017: 4), Khid above explicitly states that he does not hold such beliefs.[54]

[54] Considering the worldviews analyzed in this study, Ameeba and Khid sometimes appear to be almost in dialogue in their music. In the refrain of his song "Laajakaista" ("Broadband," Ameeba 2015b), Ameeba raps "you deny having a soul without explaining what shines in these eyes" ("kiellät sielus selittämättä mikä näis silmis paistaa"). Above in this section, Khid asserts that he does not believe in having a soul. In turn, Khid raps in the song "Harha" ("Illusion," Khid 2016a) that the person he is speaking to never lived in a previous life "no matter how much it feels like you're not of this world" ("vaikka kuinka tuntuiski silt ettet oo täst maailmasta"), seemingly denying the notions of soul travel and reincarnation which are the subject of Ameeba's "Vanhasielu" ("Old Soul") song analyzed in this study in subchapter 5.2.

Additionally, like for example so-called New Atheists, Khid constructs a progressive idea of evolutionary advancement, which is historically linked to Darwinism (LeDrew 2012: 82–83), asserting that his religious views have "evolved" into rational atheistic ones. The interview extract above is from fall 2015, about six months before Khid's 2016 album *Ohi* ("Past," Khid 2016a) was released which features lyrics that openly criticize spirituality. Interestingly, studies have shown that secular individuals tend to believe in progress both in science and human morality as it provides them psychological reassurance, alleviating anxiety in similar ways as faith does for religious people (Farias 2013: 471–473). Khid constructs a certain type of spirituality as a somewhat lesser stage of development, science based atheism being the next (and higher) level. Yet, on his album *Ohi*, he has not relinquished the topic of spirituality, it has simply changed from first person singular narration to addressing the seemingly empty spirituality of others (or Khid's artist persona on his previous album), and Khid's own angst against the universe. Some lyric examples are discussed further below.

Khid also suggested that religion and spirituality are two different things, as I returned to our previous discussion about the topic (refer above for the interview extract):

> INKA: […] [H]ow do you generally understand spirituality? […] Or what did you mean when you said "not spiritual but conscious"?
> KHID: Yeah, maybe I associate spirituality with something [...] that comes from outside of people, religions and philosophies and such but then [...] consciousness in the end is probably just brain chemistry. And maybe like psyche. [...] With consciousness I mean. That when I see an animal do something then I can get feelings like wow, I don't in the end think I see the world solely through biology and anatomy. Completely. And then like if I stand on some mountain then I can experience some sentimental feeling just because of what I see so maybe that's consciousness then. But I don't find any larger meaning in that. It's just that things happen in me too through emotion so maybe that's what I mean the most with consciousness in the end.

> *INKA: […] [M]iten sä ymmärrät ylipäätään sen mitä on henkisyys? […] Tai mitä sä oot tarkottanu ku sä oot sanonu et "ei hengellinen mutta henkinen"?*
> *KHID: Nii, ehkä mä liitän hengellisyyden jonkinlaiseen […] ihmisestä ulkopuolelta tulevaan, uskontoihin ja filosofioihin ja tällasiin mut sit […] henkisyys lopulta varmaan on oikeesti vaan niinku aivokemiaa. Ja ehkä joku psyyke. […] Henkisyydel mä kuitenki tarkotan sitä. Et ku mä nään vaik ku joku eläin tekee jotain ni mä voin saada siit sellasii tuntemuksii et vau, mä en kuitenkaan koe näkeväni maailmaa pelkästään biologian ja anatomian kautta.*

> *Täysin. Ja sit sillee et jos mä seison jossain vuorella ni mä voin kokee jonku sentimentaalisen tunteen vaan siitä mitä mä nään ni ehkä se on kuitenki henkisyyttä. Mut mä en löydä siihen mitään suurempaa merkitystä. Se on vaan et mussaki tapahtuu asioita emootion kautta ni sitä mä ehkä tarkotan lopulta henkisyydellä kaikist eniten.*
>
> (Khid i2016)

Above, Khid explains his perception of various terms such as spirituality, consciousness, and religion.[55] Religion is described here by Khid as being more on the "outside" of human mind, pointing to institutional and historical aspects, whereas spirituality is mostly individual emotive response associated with the mind; similarly for example religious studies scholar Mikko Sillfors (2017: 99–100) notes that despite the fuzziness and multiple definitions for "spirituality," it is often considered as more of a personal trait or individual inner experience than religiousity or religion which are frequently associated with religious institutions and dogma. Khid evokes a scientific discourse when he asserts that chemistry of the human body can explain why people have spiritual experiences. Through such argumentation, Khid can describe himself as capable of spiritual experiences, and thus capable of understanding the world as more than mere biological or scientific facts, without jeopardizing his atheism.

Khid also explains that being an atheist does not exclude emotional responses or experiences, admitting that people do not act solely based on rationality all the time. Indeed, also other atheists have acknowledged that they believe a consciousness or mind exists, but that there is no need for using religious terms such as soul in order to make sense of it (Sillfors 2017: 145). Khid also implicitly points out that spirituality (or religiosity) is not necessarily related to believing in something (see also Hood & Chen 2013: 539). This description also fits the idea introduced by Miguel Farias (2013: 469) that also atheists' beliefs "work not only at the cognitive, but also at the motivational and emotional levels." Summarizing, Khid's arguments in the two extracts above share traits with two larger strands in atheism which for example LeDrew (2012) defines as scientific atheism and humanistic atheism: the previous refers to a belief in the evolution of science and human morality through education, supplemented by an outright denial of god, and the latter to

[55] The English translation for both nouns "hengellisyys" and "henkisyys" which Khid uses is "spirituality" (see also Sillfors 2017: 98). The Finnish words can be used as synonyms in everyday language. For the sake of clarity, I am using the words "spirituality" and "consciousness" here. Sillfors (2017: 98) notes that in Finnish, "hengellisyys" is more related to Christian spirituality whereas "henkisyys" is typically associated with Eastern religions and new spirituality such as New Age.

acknowledging the existence of psychological and social reasons for certain experiences labeled as religious.

Related to this, perhaps the most explicitly atheist lyrics can be found in Khid's song "Harha" ("Illusion," Khid 2016a), where Khid raps that he cannot relate to spirituality:

> Vibing doesn't interest me and I don't relate to spirituality
> Lifeline just a hole I pressed charges against the universe
> No disappointment no fundamental bitterness
> Like with those who think that life should be something else
> What do you know about something better
> You never lived in the previous no matter how much it feels like
> You're not of this world
>
> *Fiilistely ei kiinnosta enkä samaistu henkisyyteen*
> *Henkireikä pelkkä hole universumille mä nostin syytteen*
> *Ei pettymystä ei perinpohjaista katkeruutta*
> *Niinku niil joiden mielest elämän pitäis olla muuta*
> *Mitä sä tiedät paremmasta*
> *Et eläny aiemmassa vaikka kuinka tuntuiski silt*
> *Ettet oo täst maailmasta*
>
> ("Harha" ["Illusion"], Khid 2016a)

In the lyrics above, Khid denounces spirituality as uninteresting and unrelatable. The lyrics also reject reincarnation (having lead a previous life) and ideas about supernatural existence (not being of this world). This seems like a rather clear objection to the kind of alternative religions or strands of new spirituality drawing from Eastern religions that have been discussed in this study. According to the lyrics, Khid cannot relate to such spiritual ideas or behavior.

The lyrics also suggest that this kind of religiosity is in fact a rather empty way of compensating for personal feelings of disappointment and bitterness. This is reminiscent of how for example Marx and Freud characterize religion as an "illusion," serving as "a mechanism for coping with suffering and the harsh realities of life." (LeDrew 2012: 80.) I argue that through this song, and others on *Ohi* ("Past," Khid 2016a) album, Khid perpetuates and constructs historically reoccurring atheistic discourses which deny the existence of otherworldly or supernatural existence. These kinds of atheistic discourses are generally used as a way to label people who believe in other than naturally occurring phenomena as irrational (see for example Oppy 2013 about naturalist arguments). When close listening to Khid's

tone of voice in such songs as "Harha," the affect conveyed through his vocal expression is that religious ideas are irritating in their supposed stupidity (raising intonation and/or noticeable tensity). Note that Khid does not specify who he is addressing here; considering how he talks about spirituality and atheism in my interviews (Khid i2015; Khid i2016), he may also be addressing his artist persona's previous enchantment with religious ideas.

"Harha" was also one of the most if not the most important songs for Khid on the *Ohi* album, as he explains below:

> KHID: And then maybe for me in the end the most important song is the song called Harha which [...] is pretty much [...] my divorce from all that deep stuff. [...][M]aybe I'm no longer that kind of guy who thinks anything would have purpose or would have some deeper dimensions or that some universe would have anything to do with me. In a way put very crudely [...] that you experience the world based on your emotions and then look for deeper meaning for those sensations. So I've maybe given that up.
>
> *KHID: Ja sit ehkä itelle lopulta tärkein biisi on se Harha niminen biisi joka […] on aika pitkälti […] mun avioero kaikest semmosest diippeilystä. […][E]hkä ei enää oo semmone tyyppi et kelaa et millään ois mitään tarkotusta tai olis jotenki syvempiä ulottuvuuksia tai että jollain universumilla ois mitään tekemistä mun kanssa. Tavallaan siis tosi karusti sanottuna […] et kokee maailman tunteidensa pohjalta ja sitte niille tuntemuksille etsii suurempia merkityksiä. Nii mä oon ehkä luopunu sellasest.*
>
> (Khid i2016)

Here, Khid explains the atheistic idea behind the song "Harha." He equates spirituality with a search for larger meaning caused by individual emotions or sensations. This is one of the few occasions where he constructs an idea of conversion: note the temporal "no longer," which suggests that he has not always been the kind of atheist he is today. Khid's atheism or resignation seems to be from non-dual new spirituality in particular where a belief in some kind of universal consciousness and personal connection to it is central. According to Khid, there is no larger purpose in life, and expecting there to be supernatural or transcendent entities connecting with his life and being is essentially an illusion. He also returns to the idea that emotions originate in human mind instead of having supernatural origins and should thus not be assigned any religious meanings.

At the same time, Khid constructs the idea of individualism and self-mastery which is typical among both atheists and adherents of new spirituality (Farias 2013).

Farias (2013: 475) discusses self-mastery through dualistic Gnostic and modern existentialist thought, defining it as independence from God or the universe which also produces existential anxiety as we are then the sole masters of ourselves. Farias (2013: 475) further draws a line from existentialist philosophy to today's atheism: "self-reflective autonomy has given way to competitive individualism, the desire to master and portray oneself as distinct from the rest of humanity." In Khid's music, there is plenty of existential rumination, even angst (a term he used himself in my interview), which focuses on the individual. For example, in the second song of the *Ohi* album (Khid 2016a), "Kuolen tunnin" ("I'll die an hour"), Khid raps: "puhun itestäni itelleni itekseni" which translates "I speak about myself to myself all by myself." This constructs the idea that the artist persona is first and foremost focused on introverted self-reflection, and not on other people's views. Opponents of new spirituality accuse adherents of narcissism and navel-gazing, among other things, but as these lyrics perhaps also demonstrate, this kind of criticism has never been central to Khid's atheistic discourse: in fact, individualism and individual thinking is often at the center of it, and in this sense, his worldviews are not that far removed from the general development in Western religiosity towards individualism. I am tempted to suggest that rap music with a Christian or Islamic worldview is arguably more community centered than the kind of music made by Khid, Julma Henri, or Ameeba with its seeming emphasis on personal and individualist views.

As stated, despite his current explicit atheism, some of Khid's own songs and his collaborative songs with the other artists in this study have contained ideas about spirituality. Below, Khid attempts to construct a consistent image of his atheism by stating that while he did utilize spiritual ideas in his music, the ideas were not completely contradictory to his current overt atheism, as they were chosen for aesthetic and not religious reasons:

> KHID: The fact that I've collaborated with those guys. It had more to due with me being their friend than us necessarily sharing things on a spiritual level regarding the themes [of the music]. […] As I've gotten older I've started to wonder why I as an atheist talk about a soul in my songs, fifteen years ago I, soul is a completely Christian [term] and I've never been connected to that in any way, like why I use, even in my everyday language a terminology of a [religious] body I don't feel a part of […] I mean using terms that according to your set of values […] according to your worldview is kind of controversial.
>
> *KHID: Se et mä oon tehny noiden tyyppien kaa yhteistyötä ni. Enemmän se on vaan liittyny siihen et mä oon niitten frendi, eikä siihen et me ois jaettu henkisel tasol välttämät hirveen paljoo yhtäläisyyksii siinä tematiikassa. […] Nyt vanhempana ruvennu hämään et miks mä ateistina puhun sielusta mun biiseissä,*

> *viistoist vuotta sitten mä, sielu on täysin kristinuskonnollinen ja mua ikinä ollu mitenkään liitoksissa siihen, et miks mä käytän jopa mun arkikielessä terminologiaa joka on instanssilta, johon mä en koe kuuluvani. […] Elikkä käyttää tavallaan termei mitkä on sun arvomaailman kannalta […] sun maailmannäkemyksen kannalta ikään kuin ristiriitanen.*
>
> (Khid i2015)

Here, Khid returns to the idea of evolution from religious to atheist views, as he talks about growing older; he then also implicitly associates religiousness with a kind of naiveté attached to young age. In this specific case, he associates the word soul with Christianity, and expresses regret about having used such religious language, clearly separating himself from this religious body. In other words, he connects certain terminology with a religious authority and institution while asserting that the Christian understanding of a soul is different from his own worldview. This extract is consistent with the evocation of authenticity discourse above where Khid connected his music with his worldviews, stating that he feels uncomfortable rapping about things he does not "underwrite": because he does not consider himself a Christian, authenticity as an atheist rapper thus means not using such terminology anymore. Thus, authenticity is here explicitly attached to his current atheistic wordview.

Khid also extends his idea of authenticity to collaborations with artists who may hold different religious views; he does not by association hold similar views. Khid further clarified his stance in our e-mail correspondence in 2017, two years after the interview quoted above, connecting the spiritual themes in his music with esoterism:

> That kind of vibing / spirituality / esoterism (whatever you want to call it) in my older music has in the end been a result of following a certain code and aesthetic for extramusical reasons, and not something genuinely coming from me. In other words I thought it was cool to be that guy until later I realized it was all just one big larping on my behalf and on behalf of the people around me and just a learned "keeping it real" [...].
>
> *Sellanen tietty fiilistely / henkisyys / esoteerisuus (mikskä sitä nyt ikinä sanoiskaan) mun vanhemmissa musahommissa on lopulta ollut oikeastaan tietynlaisen koodiston ja estetiikan noudattamista ulkomusiikillisista syistä, eikä musta itsestäni aidosti lähtevää. Toisin sanoen must oli cool olla se tietynlainen tyyppi, kunnes myöhemmin tajusin että seki oli vaan yhtä suurta larppausta mun ja ympärilläni olevien toimesta ja yhtä opeteltua "aitoilua" […].*
>
> (Khid p2017)

In these two extracts above (interview and e-mail), Khid explains the seeming incoherence between the way he talks about spirituality today and his past musical endeavors. Despite the previous *Ei* album's ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) spiritual and esoteric themes, in my interview in fall 2015 (Khid i2015) Khid proclaimed to be an atheist and said he partially regretted having been involved in songs with such overtly spiritual message: he does not believe in that anymore, and has "evolved" as he mentions in the extract further above. Interestingly, Khid admits above that he used spiritual and esoteric ideas and aesthetics as a cultural resource (cf. Wuthnow 1998: 8; cf. Taira 2006: 55; cf. Wood 2007: 37) in his music rather than as an expression of his authentic feelings or worldview. We cannot draw a direct link between what he says have been his personal views and the developments in his music; nonetheless, he constructs these as having strong interaction and hence builds a certain authenticity around his music, as supposedly the "real" him is involved in the artistic expression. Khid seems to suggest that logically, we should act according to these individual beliefs, and when and if these beliefs change, this should be reflected in our expression. It appears that Khid's positive atheism is atheism from the kind of new spirituality which the other artists in this study represent. In essence, he asserts that spirituality should ideally be an individual choice emanating from personal experience rather than from collective ideas or ideologies (not "larping"[56] spirituality); this is a significant example of a stance which is coherent with the major overall shift in Western religious landscape from institutional to personal authority.

Khid's emphasis on personal views and beliefs in the various interview extracts in this section also resonates with what Paul Heelas et al. (2005) call the subjective turn, entailing that individuals themselves should decide on their worldview. Farias (2013: 477) even claims that "[c]oncerning motivations, atheists are practically indistinguishable from New Age individuals" as both are typically liberal, open, and individualistic; however, atheists are generally more individualistic than believers (Farias 2013: 475). This individualism in the West has been associated with the rise of Protestantism and its emphasis on private and personal relationship with god but also its theological curiousity which supported the development of scientific methods of inquiry (see Farias 2013: 476). Protestantism is the dominant denomination of Christianity in Finland, thus those brought up in atheist families also have a cultural and social connection to it. I argue that also Khid's construction of atheism has been influenced by the Protestant worldview, not only due to him living in Finland but because he frequently mentioned Christianity specifically when

[56] "Larping" as a term originally refers to live action role playing games where players assume roles that they act out physically. Interestingly, I have noticed that larping is now rather commonly used in the Finnish hip hop scene to refer to the performative aspects of rapping, such as creating artist personas.

speaking of his own atheism. Critiquing the Christian church is a typical trait among Finnish nonbelievers (see section 3.2.2).

In our e-mail correspondence (Khid p2017), Khid also asserted that his worldview has "always been totally science-based" ("mun maailmankuva on aina ollu täysin tiedepohjainen"). Religious studies scholar Lois Lee (2013: 594) states that in Western Europe, notions of atheism have been strongly influenced by a "'religion versus science' discourse," and Khid seems to evoke the same discourse as he associates his atheism with a science-based worldview. Also sociologist Stephen LeDrew (2012) traces the development of atheism through the development of natural sciences, referencing for example Darwin's theory of evolution as a significant turning point (2012: 75). Khid's discourse is similar to so-called New Atheists in the sense that he constructs a conflictual relationship between science ("facts") and religion but contrary to them, Khid does not build a political and ideological stance (see LeDrew 2012: 81–82). He does not appear to be "on a crusade" against religion or to criticize religious people overtly, and hence he does not fit the typical characterization of New Atheism (see Zenk 2013).[57]

Yet, the stance against hip hop's authenticity ideology that appears in Khid's lyrics in the song "Ateisti" ("Atheist," Khid 2016a) can be seen as analogous to New Atheism's rhetorics of positive atheism, the explicit denial of the "God" or other object of worship. His own explication about the song is discussed in section 6.2.1 where I analyze how the artists discuss the ideology of authenticity. The lyrics below illustrate this idea of Khid as a non-believer:

I'm not doing anything real
And I'm not joining any cult
Where grown up believers think they own women

En oo tekemäs mitään aitoo
Enkä liittymäs oppilahkoon
Jossa aikuiset uskovaiset ajattelee et omistaa naiset

("Ateisti" ["Atheist"], Khid 2016a)

Here, Khid denounces the "cult" of authenticity. The lyrics above also criticize hip hop's pervasive sexism, how the "believers" think that hip hop authenticity equals

[57] As for example Zenk (2013) and Taira (2015: 12–13) note, the whole idea of a New Atheist movement is highly debatable and journalistic in origin. There is "no programme or manifesto of 'New Atheism'" and the most prominent public new atheist figures also differ substantially from one another (Zenk 2013: 255).

holding misogynistic and sexist ideas and manifests as the objectification of women. Analogies could also be drawn to many patriarchal religious groups or cults. Atheism thus becomes a liberating and intellectual alternative and a metaphor for denouncing traditional and repressive ways of thinking. Authenticity instead is equated with a kind of blind faith, inferior to individual and independent thinking.

Although this study lacks space to deal with the various aspects of Khid's music properly, I wish to mention that his songs also tackle some existential questions related to (post)modern life and millennial generation. Particularly questions of identity and general insecurity seem to appear in many of Khid's songs; this existential insecurity, as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 68) characterizes, is not about ontological uncertainty but is identity-related, arriving as a result of the precariousness of employment, relationships, and ultimately of our value as productive members of society. Of interest to the present study is that humanistic atheism claims religion to function as a response to this kind of social and psychological precarity and suffering (LeDrew 2012: 78).

In Khid's music, these ideas manifest as descriptions of how people attempt to construct their identities around taste in food (eating sushi), for example, to compensate for their lack of identity markers (see "Visioita Louvren vessasta," "Visions from the Louvre toilet," Aivovuoto/Khid 2015). Further, Khid also expresses distaste towards consumerism; in many ways, particularly his songs on the split album *Se tuli televisiosta / Sushi Drive-By* ("It was on TV/ Sushi Drive-By," Aivovuoto/Khid 2015) compare consumerism to religion which offers no release from existential pain. In this way, he shares some common themes with Ameeba in addition to accentuating individualism. Whereas Ameeba could be considered to represent the archetype of a creative and mentally troubled artist of romanticisim (when considering his lyrics and interviews), Khid's discourse moves towards the rational creativity discourse inspired by Enlightenment's scientific thinking and post-WWII avant-garde movement; this strand considers creativity to be guided by rational thought as opposed to some outside source, divinity, or "madness." (Leman 1999: 287–288.) Khid denies the existence of any external entities providing inspiration (Khid i2015).

The current subchapter has outlined some of the major religious and atheistic tendencies in Ameeba's, Julma Henri's, and Khid's expression. The artists have distinct emphases in the worldviews which they construct, yet all three exhibit individualistic and syncretistic views, forming worldviews which draw from multiple sources, and according to them are based on personal beliefs and experiences. While Ameeba and Julma Henri appear to share a pluralistic approach according to which all religions share core truth(s), Ameeba's influences draw more from an ecologically oriented New Age framework with apocalyptic visions. In turn, Julma Henri tends to draw from Buddhism and Hinduism, and particularly the non-

dual perspectives of these two religious traditions are strongly reflected in his lyrics. Khid's atheism features traits from scientific atheism with a strong belief in human evolution, while turning away from Christianity's teachings and to some extent also away from new spirituality. Yet, he admits some religious ideas have appeared in his lyrics, complicating the notion of explicit atheism in his case. Indeed, his artist persona and music appears slightly syncretistic rather than as purely atheist.

4.2 Personal experience and artist persona

This subchapter has two main purposes. Firstly, I discuss some of the ways in which the artists employ and construct the discourse of (rap) authenticity and connect it to their personal experiences (section 4.2.1). Specifically, I analyze how this discourse on personal-experiential authenticity manifests when Julma Henri and Ameeba discuss their music making as a form of self expression. This notion was touched upon in the previous section on Khid's atheism. In other sections in this study, this issue is discussed more explicitly in relation to the expression of religious worldviews and ideas, and how the interconnectedness of authenticity and spirituality is constructed. Secondly, this idea of personal authenticity is complicated with the help of a theoretical notion of performance persona formulated by Auslander (2004) (in section 4.2.2). Overall, this subchapter demonstrates of the multifaceted and complex relationship between perceived personal authenticity and constructed, even theatrical artist persona.

4.2.1 "It's been kind of like writing a diary"

Authenticity is not only a discursive construction but holds real value for people and their worldviews.[58] This appreciation of integrity is a potential reason why the artists in this study underscore that they will not (or cannot) make music that is contrary to their personal (world)views all the while remaining critical towards the ideological notion of hip hop authenticity. As Tricia Rose (2008: 136) notes, "keeping it real has become a genre convention as much as a form of personal storytelling." This ideological aspect of authenticity in the hip hop genre will be dealt with more in subchapter 6.2. In this current section, the latter part of Rose's statement, the idea of including narration of personal experiences into rap, is analyzed, especially regarding Ameeba and Julma Henri and how their personal storytelling is linked to the worldviews that feature in their music.

[58] See also Speers (2014: 42) on "lived out" authenticity and how this entails "being an authentic rapper as lived out in daily life rather than purely at a discursive level [...]."

The romanticized notion that the author's life is reflected directly in their music is a common one among rap listeners, and one of the defining characteristics of hip hop authenticity (Williams 2014: 120). The storytelling in rap draws heavily from afrodiasporic oral traditions such as toasting, which is a narrative poem with several features that complement the expression, including rhymes, exaggeration, metaphors and similes, boasting, explicit language, and repetition (Keyes 2002: 24). However, as discussed previously, also first person narratives have been highly appreciated in such traditions and in rap as well. As articulated in the quotation by Rose above, artists, listeners, and the music industry are heavily invested in the genre ideology of authenticity in hip hop which then connects with these oral and lyrical expressions. While this may impose demands for artists to construct or even fabricate authenticity,[59] it also allows artists to tell deeply personal stories through rap and even use rap as a therapeutic medium.

In addition to its afrodiasporic roots, hip hop culture has a remarkable ability to adapt itself to local circumstances and to function as a tool for constructing local identities and culture(s). Often, the various elements of hip hop are used for building and expressing communal identities but hip hop is also an important vehicle for individual self-expression. Robin Sylvan (2015 [2001]: 415) suggests that rappers may consider speaking "from the heart" and being truthful as related to spirituality and that this also reflects social experiences and values as the rappers are "representing" their community and localities (cf. Forman 2002; see also section 3.2.1 in this study). When Sylvan (2015 [2001]: 414–417) characterizes US underground hip hop's ideology of inclusivity, peace, and love as tightly connected with its spirituality, this specific form exhibits a rather communal view of religiosity, whereas the individualistic views of the Finnish underground rappers under scrutiny in this study seem somewhat different. Even though the four Finnish rappers are describing events, ideas, and conditions shared by many, they frame their lyrics and storytelling as reflecting individual worldviews and life experiences, occasionally even denying that the music they make fits the rap or hip hop genre (see section 4.3. below).

Based on this study's data, the four Finnish underground rappers seem to perceive their music as an alternative to mainstream music both lyrically and soundwise, and they also portray themselves as having little regard for what they consider mainstream musical expressions or industry expectations. They often describe their music as reflecting their personal thoughts. This can be seen as a way

[59] See for example the infamous case of white middle-class hip hop artist Vanilla Ice whose story about being brought up in a rough, predominantly black and poor neighborhood, and having gang relations, turned out to be false (Rose 1994: 11–12). The story is an example of the kind racially and class-coded authenticity discussed in section 3.2.1.

of constructing personal-experiential authenticity as well as underground credibility when connected with the larger framework of music industry. Julma Henri explains some of the personal reasons why his lyrics contain ideas from Eastern religions:

> INKA: What then made you write music about that topic? Was it just [...] natural then if it was current [for you] at the time anyway or?
> JULMA HENRI: I think it's been kind of like writing a diary. What you're thinking at the time and then you write about that. Maybe there was a certain need to preach too. At least at some point. And if you've received something yourself, you [want to] share it with others.
>
> *INKA: Mikä sut sit sai kirjottaa musaa tavallaan tost aiheesta että? Olikse sitte vaan […] jotenki luontevinta, että se oli siihen aikaan tosi ajankohtasta muutenki vai?*
> *JULMA HENRI: Mä luulen että se on ollu vähän sellasta päiväkirjamaista touhua. Että mitä on mielessä millonki ja sitä sitte kirjottaa. Ehkä siinä oli joku semmone julistamisen tarveki. Jossaki kohtaa ainaki. Ja että jos on itte saanu jotaki niin antaa siitä muilleki.*
>
> (Julma Henri i2015)

My question in the extract above refers to what Julma Henri had discussed at length earlier in this same interview about his music evolving along with his thoughts (Julma Henri i2015). He suggests here that he "preached" through his music about the religious ideas and experiences he had had. He explains that motivation for this were the positive effects this process had had on him, hence he wished to share it with other people through his music, much like he would share a learning diary.

When I asked him how he feels about performing live if he is "reading his diary out loud," sharing potentially intimate thoughts, he stated that he gets bored of performing the same songs for a long period of time (Julma Henri i2015). Julma Henri, and in my experience many other rap artists, too, repeats the statement that he prefers to make music about topics that are relevant for him at the time. This of course is not limited to events in the artists' personal life, as artists also reflect the times and society they live in; of the various popular music genres, rap music in particular has a long history of producing societally and politically engaged music (on this history see for example Rose 1994; Chang 2005). In the framework of this study, I argue that the artists reflect developments in Western religiosity, and thus while Julma Henri says that Eastern ideas have been "current" for him, they have been increasingly current in the West for some decades now, and his music is one example of this.

Julma Henri stated that particularly *"Henri"* album (Julma Henri & RPK 2011) and Euro Crack's *Huume* (2013) album on his part contained lyrics which emphasize the spiritual message over the musical aesthetics (Julma Henri i2015). This seems a rather common view among rappers who consider spirituality as an integral part of their life; just like rap is part of that life, so is their spiritual life part of their rap and thus combining the two is natural (cf. Sylvan 2015 [2001]: 416; cf. Rantakallio 2013). Many also experience "hip-hop as spiritual practice" (Sylvan 2015 [2001]: 416), which some of Ameeba's lyrics also allude to (for example "Kullankaivaja," "Gold digger," Ameeba 2015c).

Later in another interview, Julma Henri expressed a somewhat similar idea that the topics in his music follow his personal trajectory. Below he asserts that he does not want to stay "stuck" repeating the same ideas over and over again:

> INKA: […][In the previous interview] you said you're done with this deeper stuff [...]
> JULMA HENRI:[...] I think they're like. Growth age stuff or life ending things [...] related to those phases, then the realization phase is over. Cause somehow I don't wanna be stuck. And generally it's always been like that that if my life goes a certain way then also it's pretty much in line with [the music] too. [...] I don't know what the motivation to do it again would then be. So far the enthusiasm has been focused on talking about the present moment.
>
> *INKA: […][S]illon [edellisessä haastattelussa] sä sanoit et sä oot valmis näihin, syvällisiin juttuihin […]*
> *JULMA HENRI: […] Mää nään että ne on vähän semmosia. Kasvuiän juttuja tai elämän päättymisen juttuja […] niihin vaiheisiin kuuluvia hommia, et sitte on se suoritusvaihe käsitelty. Ku jotenki mä en halua jäähä. Ja ylipäätään se on aina ollu sillee että jos mun elämä liikkuu johonkin ni sitte se on aika yks yhteen se juttu [musiikki] myös. […][E]mmä tiiä mikä se motiivi ois sitte tehä sitä uuelleen. Toistaseksi on riittäny sitä jauhamisintoa aina siitä nykyhetkestä että.*
>
> (Julma Henri i2017)

Here Julma Henri suggests that his personal life experiences affect his music somewhat directly, they are "pretty much in line" with each other. This entails that the song topics also change along with his personal life and ideas. Also the more intensely spiritual aspects of his music are something he calls "a phase": in this interview from 2017, he explained that he is done talking about spirituality. Thus, as

those topics are not current for him anymore, he is no longer motivated to rap about them, and has no interest in revisiting those topics.

Religious studies scholar Margarita Guillory (2015) in her analysis of singer-songwriter and neo-soul artist Erykah Badu discusses how art can function as creative medium for self-expression. Like Julma Henri, also Badu asserts that her art evolves along with her personal journey as a human being, and more importantly, that also her individual religious progression intertwines with her art (Guillory 2015: 12). This individuality is also present in Badu's religious worldview where "connecting to the higher self is more important than how an individual chooses to get to this destination" (Guillory 2015: 14). Much like Badu, also Julma Henri talks about evolving through different stages, and thus translating this into his music by not repeating the same themes over and over, but rather, the music follows his individual trajectory and development. Thematic stagnation is constructed as undesirable and unmotivational as it would be unreflective of the artist's individual journey – and perhaps potentially inauthentic.

Below, Julma Henri also suggests that his music can help him "update" his thoughts and thus help him move on after dealing with issues through his art:

> INKA: What do you get out of music making yourself?
> JULMA HENRI: I think it's […] a lifestyle which you've grown so accustomed to already. [...] Maybe it's a kind of role that you've molded into and. [...] [I] do get plenty out of it. [...] Plus it's some kind of updating for yourself. [...] That you even kind of have to make music to [...] reset yourself. Somehow with your ideas and such 'cause you're anyway a different person every year kind of. Or like same but still. Different. Maybe it's kind of like. Like that point where you take that [forms a circle in the air with finger]. Lap time like here [pokes the table with finger].
>
> *INKA: Mitä sä saat siitä, musanteosta ite?*
> *JULMA HENRI: Mä luulen et se on […] elämäntyyli mihin on jotenki niin luutunu jo. […] Ehkä se on semmone rooli joka on muotoutunu ja. […] [K]yllä mä saan siitä vaikka ja mitä. […] Plus se on jotenki semmosta ittensä päivittämistä. […] Että on vähän pakkoki tehä musiikkia että saa […] resetoitua ittensä. Tietyllä tavalla sen ajatusmaailmansa ja semmosen ku kuitenki sitä on joka vuosi eri tyyppi, tyyppisesti. Tai sillee että sama mutta kuitenki. Eri. Ehkä se on semmonen. Vähän niinku se kohta missä otetaan se [tekee ympyrän ilmaan sormella]. Kierroksen se aika että tässä näin [tökkää sormella pöytään].*
>
> (Julma Henri i2017)

This is an important and in this study thus far neglected aspect of authenticity and storytelling: rap music is also an opportunity for the artist to "vent" their life and feelings. At best, rap can act as a form of therapy (Hadley & Yancy eds. 2012). Similarly for example Keyes (2002: 229) notes that rap can function as platform for self-reflection particularly during more challenging periods in life. Viega (2016: 143) summarizes the therapeutic potential of hip hop: "Many rappers share their autobiographical accounts to relay their stories of resilience and endurance through adversity. [...] Hip Hop offers opportunities for people to be reflexive of their lived experience and the circumstances that have brought them to this moment in time." Writing and performing rap music can offer a personal or collective "catharsis" for artist and/or listeners, as this allows the artist to pour their anger, sadness, pain, and other emotions and lived experiences into their music, and thus transform negative experiences into something positive (Keyes 2002: 139; Yancy & Hadley 2012: xxv; Viega 2016: 143; cf. also Rose 1994: 19). As religious studies scholars George Yancy and Susan Hadley (2012: xxv) point out, rapping can even be a way of maintaining your mental health and sanity in harsh societal and personal life conditions. Furthermore, they assert that rap's multifaceted formal (musical, poetic) and cultural (historical, geographical) features make it an art form which "invite[s] and encourage[s] exploration of the inner self" and "provide spaces that free up ways of expressing the self [...]" (Yancy & Hadley 2012: xxxiii; see also Rose 1994).

Julma Henri also notes that perhaps he is so accustomed to using rap as a form of self-expression that it might prove difficult to stop making music. Being a rapper has become a significant part of his life, a "lifestyle" and a way to explore and express his thoughts and experiences in a way that helps him "reset" his thoughts. Julma Henri even states that he feels he "has to" make music which suggests of the kind of therapeutic role music making plays in his life. He also hints at his professional identity as a musician ("role"), which he has grown accustomed to; based on his answers above, it could be assumed that this continuity also provides him with a sense of stability.

Besides telling stories through their music, artists also interact with their listeners and often think about their reactions, particularly when sharing more personal thoughts which may cause feelings of being "exposed." Not unlike Julma Henri, Ameeba describes his records as an open book:

> INKA: Do you ever think about your fans or about other artists when you make music? Let's say you have a song finished do you ever think about what people think about it […] should I do this differently because someone might not like it? Or?
> AMEEBA: Well maybe I sometimes think about what I say if there's some, maybe something too outrageous then I might censor it. But then at the same

> time I say almost anything I want. But more like is it embarrassing to bring out something like this about myself into this but they are pretty much an open book, my records so.
>
> *INKA: […][K]elaatsä ikinä sun faneja tai muita artisteja kun sä teet musaa? Et sanotaan et sul on biisi valmiina ni kelaatsä ikinä et mitähän jengi nyt aattelee tästä […] pitäskö mun tehä tää eri tavalla koska joku ei ehkä tykkää? Tai?*
> *AMEEBA: No kyl mä ehkä jotain mietin et mitä mä sanon et jos on joku, ehkä liian törkee läppä niin sit mä voin sensuroida sitä. Mut sit taas samaan aikaan sanon lähes mitä haluun. Mut ehkä enemmän niin päin et onks tää nyt noloo tuoda tällane ajatus itestäni tähän mut kyllä noi on aika semmosta avointa kirjaa noi mun levyt niin.*
>
> (Ameeba i2015a)

While Ameeba states that his music is an "open book" about what goes on inside his head, he also suggests that he may feel uncomfortable about being honest in this way. Similarly Speers (2014: 171) notes in her study that certain rap artists, while accentuating the importance of honest music making, are anxious about being "too honest," perhaps for fear of losing their privacy (cf. Dibben 2009: 331). Ameeba seems to be concerned more with how listeners will view him as a result of this sincerity. As stated previously in this study, Ameeba's music gives the listener a sense that he is indeed rapping about his personal thoughts and experiences in the music, as "audience generally infers what the performer is like as a real person from his performance persona and the characters he portrays" (Auslander 2004: 7). He constructs this image for example through using first person narratives and other narrative tools in his lyrics in a way that listeners may assume the lyrics are connected to his personal history and everyday life. For example, Ameeba may rap about music making and spending time with his dog which are visible parts of his life also in social media (Instagram, Facebook). Barker and Taylor (2007: 191) note that after John Lennon began to exhibit "a more extreme kind of personal authenticity," this affected the rock genre as a whole as it "became increasingly important that artists bare their souls, and if they appeared to be tormented souls, all the better." The type of songs that focused on the artist's personal mental issues "became an indicator of the ultimate kind of authenticity" (Barker & Taylor 2007: 191). Ameeba in many ways fits this romantic idea present in rock music. In his lyrics and interviews (Ameeba i2015b; 2017), he confesses that his sanity is often at risk when he is making music because of his perfectionism and his independent or even hermit-like personality. This constructs the kind of "troubled" artist persona which is often considered authentic.

Hip hop scholar Michael P. Jeffries borrows from John L. Jackson (Jeffries 2011: 74–75) in asserting that we may redefine authenticity as sincerity which better conveys the idea of a connection between the performer's performance and the audience. In this way, authenticity is not necessarily dependent on the truthfulness of the expression but rather, "sincerity is validated when the narrative connects performer and audience" (Jeffries 2011: 75). This idea is reminiscent of Moore's (2002: 214) first person authenticity, "an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience," as Jeffries, like Moore, stresses the power of the receiving audience. Above, Ameeba articulates a similar understanding with his "open book" metaphor when I asked if he thinks about his audience. He constructs the idea that he bares his soul and is thus open for judgment. Ameeba claims that he says "almost" what he wants in his music, not censoring his thoughts, but is cognizant of the possible criticism of his audience.

Jeffries (2010: 69) argues that hip hop authenticity differs from other popular music genres in that "hip-hop authenticity is often purposefully theatrical and spectacular"; in the next section, I analyze how the artists describe and construct their artist personae.

4.2.2 Performance personae

An analytical concept I am utilizing in this section to illuminate how the four rappers construct their artist personas is Auslander's (2004) performance persona. Auslander (2004) separates between three aspects of the performance persona: the real person behind the artist image, the performance persona, and the character(s) the artist plays in songs, underscoring that all three may be activated at the same time during a performance of a song. "Persona" in Auslander's (2004: 6, ft. 14) definition is "a performed presence that is not a character [...] but also is not quite equivalent to the performer's 'real' identity." "Persona" in Latin literally means (theatrical) mask, thus the concept of a performance persona underscores the notion of an artist role as something malleable and changing, something that is used to cover the "real" person. The crucial reason as to why such roles fascinate audiences is the appeal of the "real," that there is a possibility to unmediated access, a glimpse into the mind and private personality of the creative individual behind their artist persona (Anttonen 2017a; cf. Dibben 2009: 331). Krims (2000: 95) discusses that in hip hop, it is often necessary to "collapse" the real person with the artist persona in order to "keep it real" in a way that is acceptable and marketable for hip hop audiences. This, as has been discussed repeatedly also in this study, is a result of hip hop's authenticity ideology that underscores autobiographical narration. Indeed, the performance persona, albeit constructed by an individual artist, is to a large extent contingent on genre conventions (Auslander 2009: 306–307).

The importance of personal storytelling for rap was discussed in the previous section. However, storytelling through popular music is also a form of theatre, as the "true" parts of an artist's experience and ideas are always selectively expressed in their music and often exaggerated or otherwise altered (cf. Till 2010: 51). This is also what Julma Henri suggests below, that while he chooses to use real events and ideas for his music, they are more inspiration and raw material than something he would translate directly into his songs:

> INKA: […] You wrote on Facebook during this past week that some journalist was surprised that your music is based on truth. Or real things and events. Tell me something about that.
> JULMA HENRI: Yeah. [...] Well it's a bit like that nowadays. There are quite a lot of different kinds of characters and such. Products. The artists.
> INKA: But then you don't have that kind of character? Or you sometime earlier, not to me but in some other interview [...] I don't remember how you put it but you said something like that you [...] speak more openly about yourself in your music than many others.
> JULMA HENRI: [...] I take fragments out of something real, life. And then that's of course […] a product, you can think of it as a product.
>
> *INKA: […] Sä kirjotit täs viikon sisään Faceen että joku toimittaja oli hämmästyny siitä, että sun musa pohjautuu totuuteen. Tai oikeisiin asioihin ja tapahtumiin. Kerro siitä jotain.*
> *JULMA HENRI: Joo. […] No niinhä se vähän on nykypäivänä että. Aika hirveesti on kaikenlaisia hahmoja ja semmosia. Tuotteita. Artistit.*
> *INKA: Mut sullako ei ole ikäänku samalla tavalla hahmoa? Tai sä joskus aiemmin, et mulle mut johonki toiseen haastikseen […] en muista millä sanoilla sanoit mutta jotenki näin että sä […] avoimemmin puhut itsestäsi musassa ku tosi moni muu.*
> *JULMA HENRI: […][M]ä otan semmosia kappaleita jostaki todellisesta, elämästä. Ja […] tietenki se on […] tuote senhän voi kattoa että se on tuote.*
>
> (Julma Henri i2017)

Here Julma Henri on the one hand criticizes other artists for being fake, yet on the other he admits that his music features fictional stories, too. Barker and Taylor (2007: 243–245) discuss the necessity for artists to reflect just how "authentic" they can be for their audience, and further, that the two main options are either trying to be as close to being the same person as the performance you give to outsiders, or using a theatrical approach, aiming at being as "fake" as possible. Most artists must at least

in the beginning of their career actively reflect on how they want to represent themselves because of the difference between "the person you think you are and the person that others perceive" (Barker & Taylor 2007: 243–244). Following Barker and Taylor's idea of theatrical "fakeness," it can be assumed that Julma Henri who uses a ski mask and has not revealed his real name to the public is aware of this and thus plays the part of a "real" person within a persona to confuse the difference between the "real" and "fake" person. This liberates him from having to portray consistently the same person or from making music which would be "easy" to listen: Julma Henri has on many occasions stated that his music is not mainstream (radio) friendly as it deals with countercultural ideas, including criticism of politicians and economic structures and policies which favor the elite. In my first interview with him (Julma Henri i2015), he expressed anxiety about showing his face and thus becoming a public figure, yet in 2017 he has performed his music live also without a mask and starred in a film (*Punasii päin*, dir. Mika Ahlfors 2018) – still in all these situations he has (to my knowledge) worn sunglasses, thus continuing to obscure his identity.

In the above extract, when speaking of "products," Julma Henri also constructs the idea that his performance persona is part of the commodification of music and artists and the general workings of the music industry (see Auslander 2004: 9). Following Auslander's theory, it appears that Julma Henri (perhaps unknowingly) criticizes artists who have multiple characters in their songs and do not reflect the "real" person in their art through their performance persona. While Julma Henri certainly has a performance persona and conceptualizes also his own artistry and music as products, he seemingly rejects the idea that they would be completely fictional. The authenticity discourse here once again is constructed as personal-experiential, as Julma Henri projects the idea that extreme fakeness is morally susceptible. Similarly in the Julma H account's Facebook status below (**Figure 3**) to which my question above referred to, he wrote: "Journalist looking at me baffled and concerned after hearing that my lyrics are based on reality and real events. I'm not surprised. Today almost everything is fake."

Figure 3. Julma H Facebook artist page status update May 12, 2017 (Rantakallio f2017).

Above, the emoji with a facial mask reminiscent of those worn by health care professionals for hygienic reasons arguably represents Julma Henri's resentment towards fakeness, as though it would be a contagious, hazardous disease. This is an interesting and rather explicit way of constructing personal authenticity in social media vis-à-vis followers and fans: Julma Henri clearly and publicly states that his music is honest, and that he dislikes the current cultural climate where nearly everything seems fabricated in his view. In this way, he also sets his own music apart from or even above "almost everything" in today's world in terms of its authenticity.

The relationship between artist roles and artists' perceived sincerity is a crucial question in this study and in popular music more generally. Below, Ameeba discusses artist roles and how they draw the audience's attention. The extract is somewhat interconnected with the previous section where Ameeba discussed his records as being "an open book." In Ameeba's case, this notion of translating his personal thoughts into lyrics also grants him an artistic persona "without a persona."

> AMEEBA: Would it be more interesting to outsiders if the artist had a role. The sunglasses and. But is it boring if [the artist] is too honest? That's what I've been thinking about. But then I can't go change that at this point anymore.
>
> *AMEEBA: Oisko se mielenkiintosempaa ulkopuolisille et sillä artistilla olis joku rooli. Ois ne aurinkolasit ja. Mut onks se tylsää jos on liian rehellinen? Sitä mä oon miettiny. Mut taas sit emmä tässä kohtaa voi sitä enää muuttaa.*
>
> (Ameeba i2015a)

Ameeba suggests that honesty or authenticity of the artist can be boring for listeners because the "real" person is supposedly not as exciting as a character that the musician creates. Ameeba does not appear to recognize the fascination that many people have with getting to know the "real" person and artist. As Anttonen (2017a: 63) explains, "the myth of the celebrity is addictive due to [...] impression of intimacy," and thus having seeming access to this attracts the audience. Anttonen (2015: 90–91) also discusses how exaggeration in performance can potentially increase the audience's yearning for "offstage" authenticity and revelations about the private personality, about the "human being" in media portrayals. While Ameeba's notable nonappearance in music media[60] does not seem to fit this scenario, at the same time he constructs an artist persona whose music is "an open book," seemingly offering intimate details of his persona and personal life. Above, he suggests that he has been authentic in his

[60] According to his own words (Ameeba i2015a) and the background research of media articles I did for this study, I am one of the few he has granted an interview.

music to such an extent that he cannot change this anymore. Ameeba's considerations regarding the supposed necessity of having a "star" persona seems to reference an archetype of a performer who remains distant and mysterious to the audience; by portraying himself as having little or no star personality, he constructs his authenticity as an artist exposing private thoughts to his audience. This image of a private yet confessional artist also extends to some of his music videos, as evidenced by the close reading of "Vanhasielu" in subchapter 5.2.

Ameeba's artist persona seems to fit Auslander's (2004: 11) description of someone who performs "a persona without portraying other characters" in that his content or style of music has not undergone any profound change despite his (previous) other aliases (e.g. sageone, amebathemoodman). Anttonen (2017a: 60) characterizes this kind of artist personality as corresponding to rock authenticity where a "stable artistic identity of a creative genius" is valued. As noted earlier, the way Ameeba constructs his artist persona fits the Romantic authentic artist, "involved in a personal journey of self-discovery and fulfilment, through the direct expression of his innermost thoughts and emotions" (Keightley 2001: 135). This, however, does not mean that his expression would be absent of modernist ideas or aesthetics, as he, too, like the other artists in this study, describes his music making and tastes more like electronic musicians and thus constructs the idea of working outside the normative rap genre (see 4.3.2 below).

Still, the fact that Ameeba mentions his audience's perceptions on several occasions slightly contrasts him with RPK, Khid, and Julma Henri, who are perhaps more representative of the modernist authenticity, where following personal ambitions and creativity is superior to responding to audience demands (Keightley 2001: 135–136). Yet, as media and cultural studies scholar Jason Toynbee (2006: 77) notes, "performative acts always include an audience." It seems natural that Ameeba would think about his potential audience, considering Bailey's (2014: 133) argumentation that "[t]he artist, particularly in a popular, commercial form like hip-hop, is necessarily driven to pursue the acceptance of an audience, but that acceptance requires to a great degree that the artist's image coincides with images and archetypes that preceded him or her." While above Ameeba evoked the idea that using sunglasses is part of a star image, he also mentioned that he had tried performing with sunglasses but stopped as it prevents eye contact with the audience (Rantakallio n2015a).

All the artists in this study have performed under different names. Below, Khid discusses the nuances of his two primary aliases, Khid and DJ Kridlokk:

> KHID: […] in a way they are really close to each other and then like night and day [...] the Kridlokk stuff it's of a certain mood and under the Khid name I do pretty much everything else. [...] [I]f those [two] weren't already established I would

likely just make all music under my given name. […] [T]hose aliases always have to do with not like a role but with just some kind of different side of the everyday me. [...] [T]he difference for me is really big. But still I am both of those personas everything that takes place under either one it still goes [...] somehow under the same aesthetics in some way. […] That kind of musical aesthetic, then lyrics side is different of course. And in Kridlokk there's some parodic humor filtered gangsta rap and then under Khid name [...] I maybe want to say things more as myself. But on the other hand [...] I don't want to say *anything* as myself anymore. Like you make up all kinds of narrator characters [...] within the song. That even if it the text is in first person it doesn't necessarily mean that it's me. Instead just like a writer will write a character into their book or movie or something, some role. The difference is big and small. […][I]t's harder maybe for me to differentiate than for others. Because [...] it's not even necessarily about what I say in the songs but which state of mind I am in when I make that song.

KHID: […] tietyl tapaa ne [artistiroolit] on tosi lähekkäin ja sit ne on ku yö ja päivä […]ne Kridlokk jutut ni ne on tietyn fiiliksen juttuja ja sit Khid-nimellä mä teen tavallaan ihan kaiken muun. […] [J]os noi ei ois vakiintunu niin mä todennäkösesti tekisin vaa omalla syntymänimelläni kaiken musan […]. [N]e aliakset liittyy aina johonki sellaseen ei nyt rooliin mut joku semmonen vaan eri puoli siitä arkiminästä. […] [S]e ero on mulle tosi iso. Mut silti kuitenkin mä oon ne kummatkin henkilöt sinänsä niin kaikki mikä kummankaan alla tapahtuu silti menee […] jotenki saman estetiikan alle ehkä jollain tavalla. […] Semmosen musiikillisen estetiikan, sit se lyriikkapuoli on tietty erilaista. Ja Kridlokkissa on taas jonkun huumorifiltterin läpi parodisoitua gangsta räppiä ja sitte Khid-nimen alla taas […] haluu ehkä enemmän omana itsenään sanoa asioita. Mut sit toisaalta […] mä en haluu sanoo omana itsenäni enää mitään*. Et tavallaan keksii kaikkii kertojahahmoja […] biisin sisään. Et vaikka se ois minä muotost tekstii ni se ei välttämät tarkota et ne on minä. Vaan samal tavalla ku kirjailija kirjottaa hahmon kirjaansa tai elokuvaan tai johonki, joku roolihenkilö. Se ero on iso ja pieni. […][S]e on ite vaikeempi ehkä erotella ku muiden. Koska […] se ei oo ees siit kiinni et välttämättä et mitä mä sanon biiseis vaan enemmän se et missä mielentilassa mä teen sen biisin.*

(Khid i2015)

Khid explains that his artist personas feature some parts of his "everyday" self, which suggests he considers parts of his artist persona as reflecting the "real" person he is in his daily life. When he makes music, he does not necessarily think about his artist persona (Khid/Kridlokk) but rather works based on the creative mood he is in, hence

differentiating between the roles is challenging. This hints at the constructedness of artist personas and characters in songs as well as the artistic process behind them: creativity and music are not necessarily based on the personas but the personas are based on the creative work and music. This is not to suggest that the creative process cannot work the other way around, too, but this is how Khid describes the process.

Interestingly, Khid then asserts that he does not want to reveal anything personal ("as myself") in songs "anymore," making up several characters for his songs instead; this answer seems to indicate that he has at some point made music that he considers more intimate and perhaps revealing. What Khid describes above relates to how Auslander (2004: 5) expands on Frith's (1996) notion of musicians as performers, comparing them to actors: "they enact both a star personality (their image) and a song personality, the role that each lyric requires, and the pop star's art is to keep both acts in play at once." Hess's (2005b) notion of "personae" also seems apt, not only in terms of Khid having the other alias, DJ Kridlokk, but also the malleability and changing nature of the persona Khid, as he explains above, could merit this description of several, even contradictory personae which seem to critique the "existing ideologies of authenticity and marketability" discussed by Hess (2005b: 300). Khid also explicitly criticizes these ideologies, as can be seen throughout this study.

Julma Henri has also made music mainly with two aliases, the other one being Julma H. When I asked him why he chose to change his alias from Julma Henri to Julma H, he called it a "side track" (Julma Henri i2017), suggesting that the Julma Henri alias, which he has used the most, is closer to his "real" personality than Julma H. He added that although changing back to Julma Henri constitutes a return to his older alias, the music that he makes is still "current," assumably referring to the content: it does not reflect the artist persona of the past, but rather his current vision. This complex negotiation between various roles and the content of various albums and songs indicates that while artists construct artist personas and actively reflect on how and to what extent they reveal their private thoughts and experiences in their music, they also attempt to maintain some perceived consistency in their expression. Julma H appears to have been more a kind of alter ego in comparison to Julma Henri. When considering the two albums that he released under the moniker Julma H, *Julma H* (2015) and *Musta albumi* ("Black album," 2016), particularly the first one featured little to no politically or religiously oriented content which Julma Henri has become known for. When doing field work (Rantakallio f2016), I noticed a distinctly smaller and less enthusiastic audience at Julma H concerts than at occasions where he performed older Julma Henri songs; arguably also the audience members perceived Julma H as a different character with more "carefree" content.

I also asked Julma Henri directly about the role(s) and mask he uses as an artist. In the Euro Crack interview in 2015 (Euro Crack i2015), RPK suggested that as a mask wearing artist, it is easier for Julma Henri to write texts and perform without

thinking too much about other people's reactions. I returned to this idea later in 2017 and asked Julma Henri if his experience corresponds to what RPK said:

> JULMA HENRI: But I don't know about that role thing. I think I'm pretty much the same person anyway. Like when I rapped on stage without a mask for example it was totally the same. Same thing.
> INKA: So why then do you wear a mask?
> JULMA HENRI: Well that's what I've been thinking about myself like why do I wear it but it does make it easier. Doing all kinds of other stuff when you for example have to be in some other role than the Julma Henri role then I can be. Like I'm not the celebrity Julma Henri in that situation instead I can be in some other role.
>
> *JULMA HENRI: Mutta emmä tiä siitä roolihommasta. Mun mielestä mä oon aika sama ihminen muutenki. Et sillon ku räppäsin lavalla ilman maskia esimerkiks niin kyllä se oli ihan se sama. Sama touhu.*
> *INKA: No miks sä sitte käytät maskia?*
> *JULMA HENRI: No sitä mä oon tässä miettinyki että minkä takia mä käytän sitä mutta kyllä se helpottaa ainaki. Kaikenlaista muuta touhua et sillon ku esimerkiks pittää olla jossaki muussa roolissa ku Julma Henrin roolissa, ni mä voin olla. Että mä en oo julkisuuden henkilö Julma Henri siinä tilanteessa vaan mä voin olla jossaki muussa roolissa.*
>
> (Julma Henri i2017)

Here Julma Henri discusses why he uses a mask when he raps. He seems to describe a situation where his mask has similar functions to the sunglasses Ameeba mentioned: it makes it easier to create an artist persona and role that combines elements of the real person behind it. RPK admitted admiring Julma Henri's ability to put himself out there, joking that it is easier for Julma Henri because he wears a mask and thus remains anonymous and shielded in a way. (Euro Crack i2015.) Julma Henri indeed wears a mask nearly constantly in performance situations so he is able take different roles in different contexts as very few people know who he is, yet he clearly wants to share what he thinks and believes via lyrics and political statements regarding for example poverty, elitism, animal rights, equality etc. What about him is meant to be fake and what is meant as an expression of his personal thoughts? While this question can never be fully answered through analysis, he seems to consider that his music reflects his "real" thoughts and opinions at least partially. The consistency which he constructs as part of the role of Julma Henri is reminiscent of Hess's (2005b: 298) "persona artist": the persona artist is not identical to the

human being doing the performing but "constructs a second, distinct identity that goes beyond a change in name." According to Hess (2005b: 298), this consistency usually affords credibility for the hip hop artist. It seems also that having one consistent artist persona which always wears a mask makes it easier to differentiate it from other roles (professional or other) Julma Henri maybe wishes to take on.

These two examples, DJ Kridlokk/Khid and Julma Henri/Julma H not only fit Auslander's (2004) idea of how the "real" person is different from the "performance persona," but also how the performance persona evolves (Auslander 2004: 9). With both rappers, it becomes evident through the interview examples that the "real" person behind the artist is still also very much part of the artist persona; the artist persona evolves *with* the "real" person to some extent. Real life mixes with fantasy. Khid has spoken about how he does not see it necessary to be honest in songs (see section 6.2.3), meaning that they do not have to reflect real events; in this case, he mentioned the artist persona of Finnish rapper Paperi T who draws on real life events to build a partially fictional character and story (Khid i2015). Similarly, Julma Henri explained above that he takes pieces of reality and places them in his songs, yet he still has a clear artist persona.

As a conclusion for this subchapter dealing with personal and constructed sides of artists, I wish to highlight what Barker and Taylor (2007: 243) note about artists portraying their "authentic" selves in their music: "[b]ehind questions of authenticity in music we can often discern the shadow of a different question. This is the problem of how self-consciousness affects performers." The artists are highly aware that their private life and personality is different from their artist persona, yet they also assert that their personal selves are very much involved in their artistic process and thus they even feel uncomfortable or embarrassed if that self is too clearly visible in their music. But, as Barker and Taylor (2007: 245) conclude, "[a]ny human personality is too complex to be projected in full." Hence, it is impossible for the Finnish underground rappers to project their views fully in their music, even if they may use expressions such as "an open book" to highlight the sincerity of their art. This complexity may or may not also be a reason why the rappers in this study have several aliases. In any case, the artists state that the different personas or characters they use are a tool for varying their expression and storytelling, yet seemingly also for retaining a certain coherence with one persona or character.

4.3 The aesthetics of alternative rap, "rap-rap," and "deep rap"

This study focuses on underground artists and thus mainly on what could be termed underground aesthetics in Finnish rap; the current subchapter focuses on delineating how the artists construct discourses around these alternative rap aesthetics. While

"underground" was defined earlier in this study as a discursive category that connotes oppositionality and an alternative to perceived conventional (music) standards and conformity, it is not only a discursive category applied in conversations about art and cultural communities, but also a notion associated with taste (Thornton 1995). Underground rappers, by being visible in the underground rap scene as performers, can also acquire roles as tastemakers (what is "liked" in the underground) via their own sounds or by revealing through social media or media interviews what music they themselves appreciate, listen to, and draw influences from. Underground rappers can be seen to possess what Sarah Thornton (1995) has termed "subcultural capital" also because they are often perceived as being more "real" than mainstream rappers. This has many historical reasons relating to societal power structures such as mainstream/hegemonic versus minority/marginalized culture, localization, black communities, cultural appropriation by white people, and the rap music industry and many other complex issues that have been dealt with by Forman (2002), Keyes (2002), Rose (1994), and McLeod (1999) among others. This potential to function as tastemakers is one reason why I consider it interesting to analyze how underground artists in this study describe their own sound and sounds they appreciate. Apart from Julma Henri, the three other rappers are also producers and DJs. RPK in particular has been prolific in these areas and has for example been largely responsible for the production side of Julma Henri's music in the 2010s. Having multiple roles inevitably influences the way the artists think about music and approach it, and they also discuss below how their tastes affect their own music making.

I wish to remark that when I use the term underground rap, the production quality in the time frame I am addressing, 2010s, is not necessarily sonically very different from more mainstream rap. Anthony Kwame Harrison (2006) discusses a distinct post-Golden Age[61] hip hop underground subgenre in the Bay Area in California which formed in the late 1990s and which values DIY ideology combined with new technology and lo-fi aesthetics, cassette tapes in particular. While Ameeba and RPK have also released cassettes and still do so today, this is currently not their main format of releasing music nor is it necessarily or primarily a cultural critique about contemporary production practices (cf. Rodgers 2003: 317) but an additional format with nostalgic value that is appreciated in underground scenes more generally. To my knowledge, Julma Henri and Khid have not released their music on cassettes, but on vinyl, CD, and digitally. Being underground is instead very much connected with

[61] The golden age of US hip hop is generally perceived to reach from late 1980s to the first half of the 1990s when for the first time a substantial amount of hip hop artists and records received mainstream recognition and chart success, and a variety of scenes and styles developed in the US.

"alternative" electronic beats, philosophical content, and independence in producing music[62] for the four artists, as will be discussed in the following two sections.

One clear discursive distinction that was constructed by the artists was one between "rap-rap" and deep rap, a more standard or aggressive style of rap versus a style with more philosophical content and more ambient sounds. The next section (4.3.1) illuminates how the artists on the one hand separate them, and on the other admit using both. Subsequently (in section 4.3.2), I analyze how the artists describe and make sense of the kinds of sounds and styles they appreciate and how these become connected with a discourse around a "deeper" and/or otherwise alternative type of underground rap which communicates spiritual and atheistic worldviews.

4.3.1 Separating and mixing the styles

Arguments regarding aesthetics tend to require a shared discourse around the meaning of good and bad music (Frith 1996: 10); similarly, it appears that the four artists in this study share a discourse and knowledge around the aesthetics of "rap-rap" and "deeper" rap. Frith (1996: 18) notes that "[t]he relationships between aesthetic judgements and the formation of social groups are obviously crucial to popular cultural practice, to genres and cults and subcultures," and I would suggest that this shared aesthetic understanding has also contributed to the four Finnish rappers' collaboration. In order to understand what the artists mean by these two distinct styles, it is necessary to decipher their explanations regarding the aesthetic qualities of rap-rap and deeper rap. Frith (1996: 87) notes that musicians are used to utilizing general terms for describing specific sounds, and these descriptions are thus challenging to comprehend unless we are also familiar with the terms' usage and meaning: "[g]enre discourse depends […] on a certain sort of shared musical knowledge and experience." I consider this applicable also to the labels of rap-rap and deep rap, which then function as "condensed sociological and ideological argument[s]" (Frith 1996: 86) about the content and value of different styles in rap. The differences between so-called rap-rap and deep rap also provide analytical insight about how the artists make sense of the spiritual content of their music and lack thereof.

In interviews, the artists define rap-rap as rap music which to a large extent focuses on narratives about hip hop culture and rap music, with little to no philosophical or abstract content and with a substantial amount of braggadocio. Braggadocio is typically about attempting to express superiority in comparison to someone else by boasting. This interesting discourse around rap aesthetics came

[62] Distribution for the study's artists' music apart from Ameeba is handled by larger labels.

across in virtually all of my interviews, and more importantly, the artists highlighted that rap-rap or rapping about rapping is different content-wise and stylistically from "deeper" rap. Rap-rap becomes associated with a more secular and superficial content whereas deep rap becomes more closely connected with spiritual/atheistic lyrics. Below, RPK constructs a discourse on "rap-rap," or rapping about rapping, by outlining some of its differences in comparison to deeper rap:

> RPK: [...][T]hat's of course a matter of interpretation what our rap-rap then is because our songs and texts are still full of references to deeper stuff too but in a way the type of the storytelling is kind of unapologetic and not so dreamy and [...] with an in-your-face style plus we've just daringly made songs about rapping.
>
> *RPK: […][O]n tietysti tulkinnan varanen asia et mitä se nyt meidän räppi-räppi on et kylhän meiän biisit ja tekstit on täynnä kaikkii viittauksii semmoseen diippeilyynki mut et se kerrontatapa on semmonen anteekspyytelemätön ja ei-niin-maalaileva ja […] in-your-face-tyylillä plus et sit ollaan ihan rohkeesti tehty biisei vaa ihan räppäämisestä.*
>
> (Euro Crack i2015)

"Rap-rap" is described by RPK through negations as a relaxed subgenre or style of rap in which lyrical content is often secondary to the energetic or contentwise laidback feeling of the music, thus it is less serious because the topics deal with more mundane issues; rap-rap is rapping about rapping. In this same interview, RPK also spoke about making rap-rap as "liberating himself" ("vapauttaa ittensä") as he explains he has mostly released rap with "deeper" content. Rap-rap can be something RPK enjoys just for the music: a "banger" beat or style is enough, and the song does not have to contain a deeper message (Euro Crack i2015). It seems that rap-rap is all about sound, delivery, style, and "unapologetic" braggadocio, whereas deeper rap prioritizes the philosophical content, sometimes even at the expense of the sound and musical aesthetics as came across in one Julma Henri interview where he talked about making music with lyrics dealing significantly with Eastern philosophical thought (Julma Henri i2015). As Krims (2000: 43) notes, rap music is often focused on talking about rap music for example as a way of paying homage to "old school" rap, but rap-rap does not appear directly equivalent to this kind of prevalent practice of referencing and intertextuality found in rap music more generally.

It is also noteworthy that RPK speaks about "songs and texts," seemingly highlighting that when rap is "deep," that aesthetic includes not only lyrics but also sound. RPK also suggested that conscious elements in Finnish underground rap have

become rather standardized, hence rap-rap or rapping about rapping was to him a way of "switching the game," thus "daringly" doing something alternative (Euro Crack i2015). Despite having started out as more message-oriented artist, RPK says that he has been more interested in rap-rap recently as he became excited about the new wave of rappers in the US who weren't afraid to compliment themselves in their lyrics (Euro Crack i2015). Thus, making rap-rap can sometimes be an alternative form of rap. It also seems that to some extent rap-rap corresponds with "hardness" and masculinity, particularly when RPK describes the style as being "in-your-face." If emotions are shown in rap-rap, they reflect aggressive confidence, not sensitivity or vulnerability. It thus seems rap-rap requires less emotional work than deeper rap.

Ameeba ties rap-rap with a kind of easygoing, relaxed, and contentwise "empty" style:

> AMEEBA: [...][O]ccasionally I've tried to write on purpose some so called rap songs which don't deal with much stuff. You need a break sometimes.
>
> *AMEEBA: […][V]älillä ihan tarkotuksella yrittäny kirjottaa jotain niin sanottuja räppibiisejä mis ei niin käsitellä mitään juttuja. Välillä tarvii lomaa.*
>
> (Ameeba i2015a)
>
> AMEEBA: Isn't [RPK] just making rap now? […] Or no well there's still that deep guy living [inside] there [...]. Or well half of the Euro Crack album too was just rap. If you get what I mean by rap? Rap [laughs].
>
> *AMEEBA: Et tota eiks [RPK] tekee nyt pelkästään tota räppiä? […] Tai ei siis onhan siinä edelleen se diippi jäbä elää […]. Tai olihan puolet Euro Crack levystäki pelkkää räppiä. Jos nyt ymmärrät mitä mä räpillä tarkotan? Räppiä [naurahtaa].*
>
> (Ameeba i2015b)

Ameeba defines rap-rap as music that does not "deal with any stuff": his words construct the style as nearly meaningless lyricism. Because the lyrics in rap-rap are close to nonsensical, writing such music constitutes a "break" or vacation for his brain from more serious music making. This again suggests that deeper rap requires more intellectual and emotional effort from an artist than rap-rap which may also be a potential reason as to why some underground rap fans hold deeper rap in higher regard if they assume that such artists work harder than their rap-rap colleagues who are more focused on bragging in lyrics. RPK mentioned that some people have

expressed disappointment towards his music when it has not featured such deep and "touching" content, being closer to rap-rap instead (Euro Crack i2015). Ameeba suggests above that one half of Euro Crack's *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a) was about the deeper message and thus stylistically different from its other half which was "just" rap. Ameeba creates a discursive juxtaposition between this kind of "deeper" music and "rap-rap," although they may mix sometimes, as he notes that as an artist RPK is "still that deep guy." In other words, an artist can choose to make one or both types of music, which does not mean they are not capable of expressing deeper sentiments and thoughts in music. I have also left Ameeba's laughing into this transcription to indicate how he frames rap-rap as something less serious.

Ameeba's description above is consistent with how RPK explained Euro Crack, that while RPK has previously made "deeper" rap and Euro Crack to some extent is a departure from that, he still tends to navigate towards that style of rap when making music (Euro Crack i2015). RPK stated that current rap trends as well as his musical history had an impact on Euro Crack's music, and described rap-rap as connected to a "trendy" or current sound in rap and "bragging" and "flossing" (showing off) (Euro Crack i2015). However, Euro Crack seems to be an exception to the discursive juxtaposition between rap-rap and deep rap as the duo incorporates both of these seemingly opposite elements. Frith (1996: 93) states that this is in fact how genres operate, through "rule testing and bending," through transgression: Euro Crack bends the perceived stylistic boundaries between rap-rap and deep rap. The duo's music contains "trendy," "banger" beats and braggadocio, which according to RPK are crucial to current rap aesthetics more generally and were something he is also drawn to. However, Euro Crack still has traces from more philosophical texts and RPK's past projects which were less "rap" (Euro Crack i2015). He also labeled his previous music with Ceebrolistics as original ("omintakeista") in comparison to "basic" music, giving 1990s boombap rap sound as an example of such standard style of rap.[63] RPK mentioned that he used to aim at making "timeless" music, something less bounded to current trends, constructing a discursive juxtaposition between this previous and his current "trendy" style. (Euro Crack i2015.)

Julma Henri also stated that when they started making music as Euro Crack, he needed to switch his thinking from the philosophical, spiritual lyrics into a more "rap" state of mind ("näistä kaikesta diippeilyjutuista […] mä yritin muljauttaa aivoa sellaseen räppitilaan," Euro Crack i2015); *"Henri"* album (Julma Henri & RPK 2011) had been more focused on the religious content and Julma Henri's personal spiritual journey, and was hence categorized by Julma Henri as being on the deeper

[63] Boom bap is a style of rap music which draws heavily on sampled loops from soul, funk, and jazz music supplemented by a prominent 4/4 snare and bass drums. Examples from the 1990s include for example Gang Starr and DJ Premier's productions more generally.

end of the aesthetic scale in comparison to Euro Crack. RPK discussed the issue of personal narratives, stating that talking about yourself and expressing yourself has always been central in rap but is not necessarily important for him. He noted however that a large part of rap is also about braggadocio, and talking about yourself is related to that. (Euro Crack i2015.) Seen through this perspective, combining personal narratives and religious storytelling with a braggadocious expression, like Euro Crack has seemingly done, appears compatible.

Khid also says that rapping about rapping was one of the significant aspects of his *Ohi* ("Past," Khid 2016a) album. I inquired what this means to him, and like RPK, he spoke of braggadocio:

> INKA: [...] [W]hat you said about rapping about rapping. It's used a lot so what does it mean, in your opinion?
> KHID: [overlap] It's [...] when you rap about where you're going and what you're doing and in a way there is this strong, in rap especially that when you're talking about what you're doing and how well you do it I feel it's always related to a certain [...] undertone that's somehow being left unsaid that when I talk about what I do at the same time I am also talking about how the rest of you, who are doing something else, suck. But [...] that maybe in that sense I'm rapping about rapping that I somehow criticize it a bit the rap on that album. In that sense that maybe I myself as a thirty-one-year-old have a hard time relating to some twenty-year-old's raps if they're just talking about how their rhymes are the best in the world [...]that here we come and we're the best and a certain competition and acting macho and flexing so then maybe my rapping about rapping on that album is after all more about me precisely criticizing that how these fucking grown men are boasting, that it seems so inane. On the other hand I'm doing it in that same framework. As though thinking that I am thus speaking in the language that they understand. Maybe rapping about rapping it's just it becomes a circle spinning around itself which in the end is pretty homogenous and dull.

> *INKA: […] [S]anoit et räppii räppäämisestä. Tota käytetään paljon ni mitä se tarkottaa, sun mielestä?*
> *KHID: [puhuu päälle] Se on […] sitä et räppää kuinka meitsi tulee ja meitsi tekee ja tavallaan siinähän on tosi vahva just räpissä varsinki et se ku kertoo et mitä tekee ja kuinka hyvin sen tekee ni siihen mun mielest aina liittyy semmone tietty […] undertone joka jätetään jollain taval sanomatta et ku mä kerron mitä mä teen ni mä samal myös kerron et kaikki te muut jotka teette jotain muuta ootte ihan paskoja. Mut […] ehkä siin mieles mä räppään räppäämisestä et mä jollain taval kuitenki vähän kritisoin sitä räppiä, sillä levyllä. Siinä mieles et ite ehkä kolkytyksvuotiaana on vaikee samaistuu jonku kakskymppisen räppeihin jos se*

> *vaan kertoo siitä kuinka sen riimit on maailman parhaat […]et täältä tullaan ja me ollaan parhaat ja tietynlaine kilpailu ja machoilu ja pullistelumeininki ni sit ehkä mun se räpätään räppäämisest tolla levyllä on kuitenki enemmän sitä et mä nimenomaan kritisoin sitä et vittu ku tääl isot miehet uhoo et tuntuu iha dorkalt. Ja sit toisaalt mä teen sen siin samas viitekehyksessä. Ikäänkun ajatellen niin että mä sitten puhun sillä kielellä millä he ymmärtävät. Ehkä se räpistä räppääminen on vaa sit ku siit tulee niin semmone itteään kiertävä kehä joka lopulta on aika homogeenine ja tylsä.*
>
> (Khid i2016)

Khid constructs rap-rap as focusing essentially on the rappers boasting about themselves. He suggests he chose this form of rap because it's understandable to those who make rap-rap style of music; Khid is thus constructing his criticism through "speaking in their language," which appears logical as a successful dialogue requires a shared understanding and shared terms regarding genre conventions (Frith 1996: 87). Yet he also constructs rap-rap as boring and homogeneous. Rap-rap is seemingly a rather narrow form of expression from the viewpoint of Khid, Ameeba, and RPK, but the artists do not seem to want to exclude it from their repertoire as this would be equally limiting. They will utilize such a style should they feel like it, somewhat tongue-in-cheek perhaps, and they find it annoying if someone else tries to dictate what they should or should not be doing aesthetically (see subchapter 6.1).

Interestingly, Khid also mentions age here: as a thirty-something-year-old, he claims he cannot relate to rap-rap made by twenty-somethings, implying that younger rappers tend to use the rap-rap style more. He thus constructs rap-rap more generally as a childish format. Khid describes his own "rapping about rapping" as a critique of rap-rap, more specifically as a critique of the hypermasculine, macho boasting prevalent in rap.

Khid also connects rap-rap with the energetic grime genre in his own expression:

> INKA: So tell me a little bit about the pieces or themes that you have there [on *Ohi* album].
> KHID: Well there is some rapping about rapping. I wanted to [...] make a grime referencing album. Which would still be my version of it, like there are strong elements of British grime there. But then I somehow didn't just want to make the same thing in Finnish. So I tried to find the kind of subjects that I could just. In a way the beats defined the mood a lot so then I think some beats were just really like rap or that they didn't have any [...] like profound feeling or something like that so I thought that I just want to write a couple of songs which would be fun to do live just like in an energetic way.

> *INKA: No kerro vähän niist palikoista tai teemoist mitä siel [Ohi-levyllä] on.*
> *KHID: No siin on vähän sellast et räpätään räppäämisestä. Mä halusin […] tehä semmosen jotenki grime-viitteellisen levyn. Mikä ois kuitenki mun versio siitä et siel on vahvasti tavallaan elementtei semmoseen brittigrimeen. Mut sitte mä en jotenki halunnu vaan tehä sitä samaa suomeks. Ni sit mä yritin löytää sellasii, sellasii aiheita mis mä voisin vaa. Tavallaan et ne biitit määritti aika paljon sitä tunnelmaa ni sitte, sitte mun mielest jotku biitit siin oli vaan semmosii tosi niinku räp tai et niis ei ollu mitään […] kauheen semmost henkevää fiilistä tai semmost tietyl taval ni sit mä aattelin et mä haluun vaan kirjottaa pari semmost biisii mitkä ois kiva vetää keikalla sillee vaa energisesti.*
>
> (Khid i2016)

Here, Khid explains that he wanted to make energetic music, and argues that adopting grime as a style of music fulfilled this purpose and allowed him to create rap-rap. Interestingly, Khid also associates rap-rap here with more energetic flow of music, similarly to RPK. The grime genre that developed in East London in the early 2000s is usually described as reflecting the social and economic realities of the black British working class. In addition to a very fast tempo (standard is 130–140 bpm), syncopated break beats, and video game sound samples, British grime music is known for featuring aggressive rapping that draws from local dialects and slang as well as *patois* – this is due a large portion of the British black population having roots in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. Reggae and ska as well as dancehall are historical precedents for grime alongside the slightly newer genres such as hip hop, garage, and drum'n'bass. Because of the energetic style of the music and class background of the artists as well as suspicious attitude of authorities towards the genre, many have also compared grime to punk. (Dedman 2011; Bramwell 2011; Charles 2018.)

Khid constructs a juxtaposition between "rapping about rapping" and profound ("henkevä") rap with philosophical content or sound. "Henkevä" is a difficult word to translate as it does not necessarily have a religious connotation although it can be understood as spiritual. In this context, I understand it to suggest something outside of the ordinary, more serious or abstract contemplating and philosophical pondering in the musical content (lyrics/sounds). It also becomes evident that sampling and versioning are by no means the antithesis of original work: Khid says he references grime while making his own, original contribution (cf. Shusterman 2004: 461). At the same time he discursively constructs this kind of music as fun to perform, implicitly suggesting that the more philosophical music does not induce an easygoing feeling for him. "Deep" music can perhaps take you to a deep place which can be psychologically taxing.

Frith (1996: 22) notes that social context shapes the value judgements given to different cultural forms and hence, we must try to analyze those contexts in order to

understand which cultural forms are appreciated and in what type of a context specifically. As I am trying to understand what are the "social reasons" mentioned by Frith (1996: 22) that affect the above kinds of judgments of (rap) music, what is valued, I have noted that a certain autonomy and authenticity are paramount to the four Finnish rap artists in this study; they claim to do the kind of music they want to without trying to make a "hit" song for the music markets (see 6.1 below). Also, when they apply the style that they collectively identify as rap-rap or rapping about rapping, which is seemingly less intellectually and emotionally stimulating than deep rap, choosing such an approach in the underground scene (as opposed to making philosophical or political or otherwise "conscious" rap) can be seen as rebellious, unapologetic, and authentic (sincere) as it reflects aesthetic choices which the artists have made based on their own vision and preferences.

Based on the analysis above, rap-rap is essentially "rapping about rapping" and does not have to necessarily have any "profound" content. Rather, it's an aesthetic in its own right, aiming at an energetic delivery and potentially dissing of other artists. As regards "deeper rap," it clearly relates to something more than just philosophical content.

4.3.2 Ethereal sounds

I outlined at the beginning of this subchapter that the artists in this study appear to be more representative of electronic musicians than hip hop or rap artists. The production style and soundscape of their music, but more importantly the discourses utilized by the four artists are much closer to electronic musicians than those present in more traditional forms of hip hop where cultural-historical arguments of authenticity are used (see 3.2.1). The way the Finnish artists discuss their ideas and ideals of facelessness, anonymity, mysticism, ethereality, spaciousness, and openness to interpretation below is very close to the abstractness of electronic music – which RPK also points out explicitly and Khid implicitly when they mention that their influences come from various electronic genres.

This brings us to the question if the artists' music qualifies as hip hop at all, and what are the criteria for classifying something as hip hop or rap, what are the genre rules (cf. Frith 1996: 75–95). Also Krims (2000: 40) asserts that rap music "can never be collapsed into verbal or visual cues or systems of representation" and that the social understandings about rap and rap's significance for people are based on the music and thus analysis must take the musical side of rap as seriously as any other aspect. While this current section does not include music analysis, it examines the ways in which discourse around sounds and aesthetics constructs cultural understandings about underground rap expressions. But what is then the definitive *musical* element in rap music? Is it enough to have a vocalist rapping over a track for it to qualify as rap?

We can look at this question more generally as one of musical frame, in other words what separates a genre from nonmusical sound and what is expected of it (Demers 2010: 149). Hip hop music is popular music in the everyday sense – it is well-liked and mass-produced – but also in the sense that hip hop songs often feature verses and refrains like popular songs. Considering instrumentation, hip hop often privileges bass and drums. Electronic music, on the other hand, is more vague in terms of length of songs, selection of instruments and sounds, themes, manner of listening etc. than other forms of "conventional" music (Demers 2010: 149.) In fact, electronic music according to Demers (2010: 149), "concentrates several antiframing techniques." Sampling is a key technique in constructing a rap song, and similarly in electronic music, as Rodgers (2003: 313) outlines: "[i]n the production [...] the sampling process encompasses selecting, recording, editing, and processing sound pieces to be incorporated into a larger musical work." The artists in this study frequently use drum machines, samplers, synthesizers, and elements or stylistic influences from electronic music. This gives the music a colder and more metallic but occasionally also meditative, minimalist, and ambient sound when compared to more traditional styles of hip hop which privilege breakbeats or rely more on "organic" samples from African American genres, for example soul or funk, with real instruments instead of machine made sounds; 90s boom bap is a classic example.

Additionally, much of electronic music, like hip hop, relies on repetition and cyclical structures such as loops, which may give the listener a sensation of merging with the music. It thus seems hip hop music and electronic music have certain things in common, and thus combining the two genres is certainly possible. Of course, genre boundaries more generally are illusive as music genres tend to mix and influence each other, and thus our understanding about them is constantly changing.

Below, the analysis of the rationales provided by the artists reveals that their creative process involves searching for a more alternative, experimental and thus non-conventional (cf. Demers 2010: 7; cf. also Tiekso 2013) sound which in their view constitutes a more original approach, resorting to influences and genres from electronic music rather than hip hop. I argue that turning towards electronic music and more marginal genres can be considered one key feature of so-called alternative rap, separating it from more commercial, pop radio oriented styles or more old school[64] forms. Thus in this current section, I analyze how this discourse about rap and electronic music aesthetics becomes connected with the notions of underground

[64] "Old school hip hop" is a term commonly used to refer to hip hop music made in the 1970s and 1980s before the genre's mainstream success and stylistic diversification aided by technological innovations. Here, I refer to contemporary artists who imitate the sound of 1980s or 1990s hip hop, thus organizing their music around "older" hip hop sounds.

or alternative rap when the artists discuss their own taste in music as artists.[65] I focus on how they discursively construct and describe soundscapes and timbre rather than delineating beats, melodies, effects, software, or hardware used in creating them.

When I spoke with the artists about what they find aesthetically appealing, they used various descriptors pertaining to the texture or timbre of the music and its connotations. How the artists describe the kind of sounds they are drawn to is reminiscent of how subgenres of electronic music such as ambient or new age are described. A genre that Ameeba mentioned was dub techno:

> INKA: What has influenced you as an artist, i.e. how did Ameeba become Ameeba?
> AMEEBA: […][T]hrough Ceebro[listics] guys I [got] my infatuation with dub techno which I still enjoy perhaps more than rap. Also all other types of electronic music have influenced it and have been the basis for my own music and aesthetics behind it. I've tried to find my own sound without confining to the idea that hip hop or rap has to follow certain patterns.
>
> *INKA: Mitkä asiat ovat vaikuttaneet sinuun artistina, ts. miten Ameebasta tuli Ameeba?*
> *AMEEBA: […]Ceebrojäbien kautta [sain] mun ihastuksen dubiteknoon mitä edelleenkin fiilaan ehkä enemmän kun räppiä. Myös kaikki muu elektroninen musa on ollut vaikuttamassa ja se on myös ollu pohjana omaan musaan ja estetiikkaan sen takana. Koittanu löytää oman soundin ilman ajatusta että hiphopin tai räpin täytys mennä jonkun tiettyjen kaavojen mukaan.*
>
> (Ameeba i2017)

While musicians often have eclectic tastes in music that are not necessarily directly visible in their own artistry, here Ameeba explicitly connects his own taste in music and particularly highlights his attraction towards the dub techno genre as having strongly influenced him; electronic music has been "the basis" of his music. Ameeba asserts that confining himself to solely rap has never been characteristic of his own music or tastes. He prefers to explore sounds outside of the rap genre in constructing his own aesthetic, perhaps even moving away from rap. Similarly, many artists in electronic music claim that music should be free from all established genres and aspire to more abstract forms (Demers 2010: 149).

[65] See also 6.1.2 for how Ameeba and RPK speak about "weird" ("härö") musiikki as a sort of ideal for independent music making.

In our first interview, when I asked what kind of music Ameeba enjoys and how he would describe it, Ameeba stated that the music on the (commercial) radio does not communicate anything to him (Ameeba i2015a; cf. Frith 2007: 28), and that he prefers "strange" ("outo") or "gloomy" ("synkähkö") music. Ameeba constructed his argument also around the issue that "happy cotton candy carnival music" ("ilonen hattara karnevaali musa") does not reflect his personality or tastes, and thus while he has spent time searching for joyful or hopeful music, he has usually not been able to find any that he would enjoy (Ameeba i2015a). Ameeba suggested that pop radio music is "in the wrong tune" ("väärässä vireessä," Ameeba i2015a). As Frith (2007: 20) notes, judging music as bad is "a judgment of something else altogether," and further, that "bad music" is still often explained throught the argument of "something 'in the music itself'" (Frith 2007: 23). It is possible to assume that Ameeba aspires to hear (and make) music which is oppositional to pop radio's format music, which "gloomy" sounds arguably represent. He thus also constructs the impression that "strange" music is more representative of his idea of "good" and authentic music. According to Frith (1996: 58), artists use the terms "right" and "wrong" to describe aesthetics of good and bad music and to express their sense of obligation to "make sounds other people can't," to make what they perceive to qualify as good. Ameeba stated that wistful, melancholic music is able to move him (Ameeba i2015a). It appears his aims are somewhat similar to the attitude described by Frith, as Ameeba's notion of good or bad music is built on the music's abilities to engage him on an emotional and/or intellectual level (cf. deep rap discussed above).

Popular music scholar Alessio Kolioulis (2015: 65) characterizes dub techno as a "subgenre manifested by a sense of futuristic melancholia that incorporates urban soundscapes into electronic dub rhythms," which is also a suitable characterization of Ameeba's music. According to Demers (2010: 97), the dub techno genre also obscures the passing of time. Sounds of "hauntological melancholia" are one central facet of contemporary dub techno of such artists as Burial, more specifically an urban soundscape expressing longing for "lost futures" (Kolioulis 2015: 67). Further, dub techno "at the symbolic and material level [...] represents the encounter between ecology and technics." (Kolioulis 2015: 80). Similarly, contemporary Detroit techno has dystopian and futuristic traits and it provides commentary on contemporary capitalism (Kolioulis 2015: 75). These are characteristics of Ameeba's music, too, with its themes of nature, urbanity, critique of capitalism and apocalyptic scenarios.

Whereas Ameeba has been characterized in this study as a more "romantic" artist in terms of his artist persona and construction of authenticity, Khid is closer to modernist tendencies both in terms of sound and artist persona. While these categories are by no means absolute, they still illustrate some key aspects regarding the aesthetics of these artists and how they discuss their music. Modernist authenticity focuses on experimental, avant-gardist, even radical expression which

is open towards change and sounds seemingly outside genre norms (Keightley 2001: 136–137). Below, Khid says he has always made experimental beats. Khid explains that he considers making instrumental music and rap is an occasional addition to it:

> KHID: After I started making music I pretty quickly found stuff that differs from that traditional pattern how things should sound like. Or in general it dismantled for me [...] the idea that even if you make rap it can be an expression for many other things than just these really rap related things. [...]I have always thought myself that I am just making instrumental music and then I rap if I rap but I've always just made like electronic music and then related to that there are so many projects like the genres are all over the place from freaking ambient to techno and whatever so like rap has never been the only thing. [...][P]robably ninety percent of music I make which I haven't had time to publish yet is maybe some kind of experimental electronic music though. [...] [W]henever people make up a new genre it pisses me off, like I want to avoid all of those--even if they're there to make it easier for our cognition to fathom what something could be. But I don't know. I want to think a bit that even if you make rap still I somehow want to think it like in a genreless way. Or like in a more neutral way. Like [...] rap is also just an expression.
>
> *KHID: Sen jälkeen ku alko tekee musaa ni aika nopee löys semmosii jotka vähän poikkee siitä perinteisestä kaavasta et miltä asioiden pitäs kuulostaa. Tai ylipäätään se rikkoutu mulla […] se ajatus siitä et vaikka tekee räppii nii silti se voi olla ilmasumuoto monelle muulleki asialle […][M]ä oon aina kelannu ite vaa et mä teen instrumentaalimusiikkia ja räppään niihin jos räppään mut aina tehny tavallaan elektronista musaa ja siihen nyt sit taas liittyy projektei niin paljon et ne genret poukkoilee vitsi ambientist teknoon ja mihin ikinä et räp ei oo myöskään ikinä ollu se ainoo juttu. […] [V]armaan yheksänkyt prosenttii musiikista jota mä teen, jota mä en oo vielä kerenny julkasemaan, on ehkä jotain sellasta kokeellista elektronista musiikkia kuitenki […] aina ku keksitään joku genre niin mua vituttaa, ni sit mä haluun väistää kaikki ne--vaikka ne on sillee tietyl taval helpottamassa vaan meiän käsityskykyä siitä että mitä joku vois olla. Mutta emmä tiedä. Mä haluun vähän ajatella että vaikka tekee räppiiki ni silti mä jotenki haluisin ajatella sen sillee genrettömästi. Tai sillee vähän neutraalimmin. Et […] räppiki on vaan semmonen ilmasumuoto.*
>
> (Khid i2015)

Here, Khid not only explicitly states that he categorizes his music as electronic music with occasional rapping on it but he also constructs the idea that music is first and

foremost an artistic expression which should be freeing rather than limiting. Genre labels irritate him ("pisses me off") although he acknowledges their relevance for people in categorizing and making sense of music. Thinking of a specific genre when creating music is limiting for the aesthetic he pursues, much like Ameeba stated above, which is why Khid prefers to consider his music as "genreless" even if his vocal delivery is rapping. He prefers not to follow any "patterns" or confine himself to conventional understandings of "how things should sound like"; instead, rap aesthetics can be combined with non-rap related musical expressions. Ameeba and RPK constructed similar ideas (Ameeba i2015a; i2017; RPK i2015) and it appears that this is in fact related to the discourse around rap-rap. Due to such reservations towards labels as "rap" – as labels may impose aesthetic restrictions on their music – the artists in this study sometimes seem to even avoid calling their music rap. Underground rap as an expression is here constructed by Khid as a possibility and tool for breaking such assumed boundaries and genre rules. He also mentioned being influenced by "art rap" in addition to various genres of electronic genres (from ambient to techno), and emphasized moving away from "basic rap" (in Finnish using the expression "perusräppipapatus") rather quickly when he began making music (Khid i2015). Demers (2010: 149) notes that "[a]t the heart [...] electronic music aesthetics is a continued interrogation of whether electronically produced sound can or should convey meaning" because this is a way to break norms and established frames, like the artists here assert they aim to do.

Khid also connected this alternative aesthetic approach to resisting the ideology of keeping it real. This ideological notion will be discussed in more detail in subchapter 6.2. Below, Khid explains the idea of *Ei* album ("No," Khid x RPK 2014) and its alternative aesthetics and opposionality towards the ideology of "keeping it real":

> KHID: [...][M]aybe I was able to unpack on that album that certain angst and. Certain state of mind.
> INKA: Mm. Which elements on that album do you think express angst?
> KHID: […] Those musical elements […][I]t's more just in those texts there's this […] angst against all kinds of different truths. [...] And there's quite a lot of that angst against keeping it real in particular and [...] angst like against this philosophy that's there's only one correct way for things. And then in a way it manifests in how the album sounds like if you look at it from the point of view of rap music rules. It breaks those rules quite a lot I think. And then in that text I think there's [...] a lot [of angst] with which I try to express that certain things piss me off. [...][O]ften angst can be attached moodwise to some dark or somber tone.
>
> *KHID: […][E]hkä mä sain purettuu sille levylle myös, sen tietyn ajan angstisuuden ja. Tietyn mielentilan.*

INKA: Mm. Mitkä elementit sil levyl sit on sun mielestä angstisia?
KHID: […]Ne tavallaan musiikilliset elementit […][E]nempi se on vaan niis teksteis semmone […] angsti kaikkii erilaisii totuuksii vastaan. Ja siin on aika paljon semmost angstii just aitoilua vastaan ja […] angstii semmosta filosofiaa vastaan et asiat ois vaan yhdellä tavalla oikein. Ja se sitte tietyl taval se manifestoituu siinä et se levy kuulostaa siltä miltä se kuulostaa, jos sitä tarkastellaan räppimusiikin säännöillä niin. Se rikkoo mun mielest aika paljon niit sääntöjä. Ja sit toisaalt siin tekstis on mun mielest […] paljon [angstia] jolla mä yritän ilmaista sitä että mua vituttaa tietyt asiat. […] [U]sein angsti on tunnelmaltaan liitettävissä jonkilaiseen semmoseen synkkään tai tummanpuhuvaan sävyyn.

(Khid i2015)

Khid considers that the style of his album breaks the rules of what rap music usually should sound like, and he also wants to do that on purpose. By expressing angst, the mood of the album also becomes dark ("synkkä"), as Khid uses his music to talk about things that infuriate him, particularly the idea that there is only one unequivocal truth which he later connected with the ideology of authenticity. In fact, angst becomes part of the alternative rap aesthetic in his expression and in this way, he constructs his own image as an underground artist who refuses to follow rap norms. Also, Khid and the other artists frequently juxtapose pop radio's upbeat and "happy" music with their own preferences for and influences from somber or even depressing music; they seem to draw pleasure from music that constitutes the antithesis of conventionally understood beauty and thus such music appears as liberating and unconfined as it defies conventions (cf. Demers 2010: 102–103). Demers (2010: 102, 105) discusses this kind of music through Kant's idea of "sublime," and that such "excess" in music (highly non-normative sounds) may constitute "a religious epiphany." For example, when noise music becomes understood as beautiful, this may "dismantle the musical frame that is used to maintain a healthy distance between the artwork and the outside world" (Demers 2010: 104).

Below in the next two extracts, Khid constructs a stark contrast between "formulaic" popular music and its alternative when describing his current style and sound as an artist, and the kind of music he likes:

KHID: I've always been interested in tension in music. And perhaps a certain threat but [...] tension in my opinion is really fascinating in any art [...][M]y music if I describe it myself then I don't really experience it as very dark. Nor on the other hand very [...] like uplifting either, more somehow I would want to find moodwise like in some way bleak sound where there's some tension. Some

> slightly undefined [kind] where you can add nuances with your own emotions instead of it strongly following popular music's type of way of telling you what you should be feeling at this point of the movie. Or at this part of the refrain or any song. And then maybe that kind of mysticism is strongly there too. But then again like more down to earth I'm interested in a certain kind of slowness and like ethereality and spasticism and something like perhaps also repetitiveness I think that certain kind of stagnation when it's good then it's good and you can stay stuck there as long as you want.

> *KHID: Mua on aina kiinnostanu musiikis jännite. Ja ehkä tietynlaine uhka mutta […] jännite on mun mielest tosi kiehtova asia mis tahansa taiteessa. […][M]un musa jos mä ite kuvailen sitä ni mä en ite koe sitä kauheen synkkänä. Enkä toisaalt hirveen semmosen' aurinkoisenakaa, jotenki enemmän mä haluaisin löytää semmost tunnetilaltaan jollain tapaa kolkkoo saundii mis on joku semmone jännite. Semmone vähän määrittelemätön johon sitte voi ite omilla tunteillaan lisätä jotain nyansseja sen sijaan et se noudattais tosi vahvasti sellast populaarimusiikin tapaa kertoa sulle mitä sun kuuluu tuntea tässä kohtaa elokuvaa. Tai tässä kohtaa kertosäettä tai mitä tahansa biisiä. Ja sit ehkä semmone mystisyys on siellä vahvasti myös. Mut sit taas maanläheisemmin niin mua kiinnostaa tietynlaine hitaus ja sellanen eteerisyys ja spastisuus ja joku semmone ehkä myös toistuvuus mun mielest tietty sellane junnaavuus, sillon ku se on hyvää ni sit se on hyvää ja sitä voi jumittaa niin kauan ku huvittaa.*

> (Khid i2015)

Khid uses various attributes above to characterize the soundscape of the kind of alternative art and music (or more specifically rap) that he is drawn to as an artist. Mysticism and ethereality are particularly interesting word choices considering that in this same interview, he clearly projected an atheistic identity and even expressed regret about having used tropes from spirituality in his music. We can assume spastic here refers to something anomalous and irregular. He also mentions tension, slowness, stagnation and repetitiveness; such traits are more generally part of minimalist and postminimalist music (Gann et al. 2013; cf. Välimäki 2015: 134, 171), particularly ambient and other non-dance oriented electronic music genres.

When describing music, and style(s) of music, the four artists often rely on describing feelings or sensations they get from it, like here for example Khid speaks of "tension." It seems that "for musicians, style is something that is primarily felt; it is an awareness that is as much physical as it is cognitive" (Théberge 2006 [1997]: 286). Khid also speaks of his attraction towards a feeling of "threat" in music, much like RPK (see below). Khid frequently raps about death or disappearing on his *Ei*

("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) and *Ohi* ("Past," Khid 2016a) albums, which are rather somber and ominous but recurring topics in popular music (see Partridge 2015). Another way of connoting threat or danger is how his alter ego DJ Kridlokk portrays gangster parody through Memphis rap and grime inspired beats, and in other ways utilizes the American gangsta rap tradition and its cultural context of actual (often gang related) violence. Journalist Simon Reynolds (2006 [1998]: 83) suggests that contemporary hip hop and some forms of electronic music embrace dystopian and anticapitalist influences as well as "darkness" as a social identity of being in control rather than one that is controlled; taking this idea, it is possible to argue that Khid uses these kinds of aesthetics and the atheism trope to seemingly take control over his own life in a society characterized by crumbling institutional power, neoliberal politics, and general precariousness.

In my second interview, I revisited the fact that Khid explicitly states that he wants to create music that is "ethereal" or "mystical." Below he elaborates on his ideas regarding popular music:

> KHID: […] If I find some sort of so-called mystical or ethereal in [music] then I somehow. It's got that effect that then I focus on listening to it that I'm like interested in what this is. […] [F]or me a certain feeling is born because of that and then I'm interested in it. And it's not the only thing or those are not the only adjectives that I'm interested in in music but maybe they are the ones that I'm interested in creating because I somehow feel that in a certain way in that kind of mystical and ethereal sound there's quite a lot of space, it doesn't take like. Like mysticism is in a certain way an emotion just as powerful as for example joy or grief, still I feel that in that mysticism there is more space for like to which direction this could turn. That somehow it can speak to that [...] to the listener there's space they can fill with their own ideas and their own emotions about what this song is like. That maybe the world of popular music doesn't work that way. Somehow openly in the sense that in pop music there's a lot of defining like well this is now that crying song and this is now the party song. And then in my opinion there's also between them a kind of area [...] which is really interesting to scan and think like what could I find there.

> *KHID: […] Et jos mä löydän siit jotain sellast ns mystistä tai eteerisyyttä ni mä jotenki. Siin on semmone efekti et sit mä keskityn kuuntelee sitä et mua kiinnostaa et mikä tää on. […] [M]ul syntyy tietynlaine fiilis siitä ja sit mua kiinnostaa se. Eikä se oo ainoo asia, tai ne ei oo ainoot adjektiivit jotka mua musiikis kiinnostaa mut ehkä ne on ne joita mua kiinnostaa luoda koska mä koen jotenki et tietyl taval semmoses mystisessä ja eteerisessä saundissa on aika paljon tilaa, se ei vie niinku. Et vaik joku mystisyys on tietyl taval ihan yhtä voimakas*

> *tuntemus ku vaikka sitte ilo tai suru ni silti must tuntuu et siel mystiikas on enemmän tilaa semmoselle et mihin suuntaan tää vois kääntyy. Et jollain taval se voi puhutella et […] sille kuulijalle jää tilaa täyttää omilla keloillaan ja omilla tuntemuksilla sitä et millanen tää biisi on. Et ehkä populäärimusiikin maailma ei toimi niin. Jotenki avonaisesti tietys mieles et popissahan paljon määritellään sitä et no tää on nyt se itkuvirsi ja tää on nyt se bailubiisi. Ja sit mun mielest niiden välissä on olemassa myös sellanen alue […] mitä on tosi mielenkiintost haravoida ja miettiä et mitä kaikkee sielt vois löytyy.*
>
> (Khid i2016)

Khid constructs the idea of mystical and ethereal music as a gateway to a sort of meditative listening practice ("I focus on listening"). Khid's focus is drawn to music which can "speak" to its listener. Both adjectives, mystical and ethereal, also often refer to something otherworldly, thus Khid arguably constructs the idea that this kind of music either expresses or facilitates spirituality as an individual can potentially experience deeper sensations through it. Indeed, music can be constructed to reflect spirituality by using these kinds of cultural meanings frequently manifesting in religious contexts (see Välimäki 2015: 171–172), and recently particularly in contexts attached to new spirituality (see Partridge 2004: 64) and individualistic religiosity which builds on personal experiences. Similarly here, this kind of "ethereal" music is seemingly able to speak directly to the individual instead of simply serving as mass entertainment.

It is possible to construe an analogy from Khid's argumentation between institutionalized religion and mainstream popular music, and individual religiousity and "ethereal" music which seemingly provides more space for individual experience. This ethereal music is contrasted with the kind of popular music which purportedly dictates the listener's emotions and is disconnected, as though the listener was pre-programmed to react in a certain way. The mystical or ethereal alternative, instead, seems to be able to induce an introspective journey, or an "authentic" experience of the music which transcends the everyday life. This idea, or ideal, of personal experience as providing "uncontamined access to truth" (Partridge 2004: 75) is similarly valued in contemporary Western forms of new spirituality.

How popular music sounds mediate spirituality has been written about particularly in the context of dub music and how this notion is affected not only by dub's sonic qualities such as bass, reverb, delay, and echo which create spacious and seemingly nonbounded atmospheres, but also its connections with for example Rastafari religious ideas and the altered state of mind caused by cannabis use (Partridge 2012: 192). Composers of minimalist and ambient music such as John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen have been known to draw influences from Eastern

spirituality as well as Indian music and other Eastern music cultures, which is perhaps not surprising considering that the wave of minimalist and experimental electronic music in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with the countercultural currents that fed current new spirituality (see Till 2017). The artists in this study seem to be drawn towards similar types of electronic sounds with "ethereal" qualities – note however that this does not presuppose they are drawn towards such sounds for religious reasons, as also atheists can show interest in mysticism (see Taira 2012). RPK also highlighted that sometimes philosophical or abstract content can be just about aesthetics and does not necessarily have a connection with his own life or actual state of mind (RPK i2015). Similarly Khid asserted that he has used spirituality as an aesthetic without necessarily having esoteric or other beliefs (see section 4.1.3 above). This connects the present discussion with performance personae to some extent: aesthetic choices may be a result of the artist persona or vice versa. Regardless, using such terminology as "ethereal" and sounds associated with mysticism ties the rappers' aesthetics to cultural understandings of spirituality.

Above, Khid also constructs a stark contrast between "formulaic" popular music and its alternative when describing his sound as an artist and the kind of music he likes. In Khid's argumentation, popular music and culture become a form of oversimplified, consumeristic expression which has inbuilt emotions, is easily understandable for the masses, and hence is boring and one-sided. By contrasting it to a "mystical" type of music, Khid also seems to suggest that popular music takes away space from independent, individual, and organic enjoyment of music. This is also related to the discussion below (in subchapter 6.1) about industry relations; "machine-made" music is antithetical to individual music making and experiencing (Keightley 2001: 133). Of course, what this machinery then is exactly is discursively and situationally constructed.

Khid's argumentation is reminiscent of a critique of mass produced music, made famous by musicologist Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt school, and discussed also for example by Frith (2007: 20) in connection to "bad" music. It is equally mentioned by Forman (2002: 218) as a stance favored by many hip hop purists who began speaking of "sell-out" artists once the genre reached mainstream popularity. Above, Khid implicitly describes such "closed" mass-oriented music as bad, as it does not offer the opportunity to the listener's own interpretation which he frames as facilitating a fuller enjoyment of the music. Ameeba's argumentation bears resemblance in the sense that in my interview, he described his music making as characterized by creativity, and as unconcerned by market and consumers and thus clearly the opposite of mass-oriented, commercial music (see 6.1 below). Yet, it is noteworthy that neither Ameeba, Khid, nor Euro Crack criticize commercialism per se, which is what many other artists who have utilized the authenticity discourse in the past have done (cf. also Forman 2002: 218). Mass culture critique by rap artists

is thus nothing new, but Khid tying it with aesthetics in the above way creates an interesting new viewpoint to the subject. Khid characterizes popular music as containing various closed entities that allow little space for personal engagement and emotional response.

This discussion about popular music also becomes a question of authenticity; according to Khid, the pop music world does not engage the listener's inner feelings as it does not provide space for them to take place in. However, the mystical type of music supposedly does just this, as Khid implies that it interacts with our "own ideas" and "own emotions." This is highly similar to the authenticity discourse within new spirituality where authentic individual spiritual experience is perhaps the most valued form of religiosity (York 2004: 311). It is also reminiscent of how Brian Eno has conceptualized his idea about ambient music as avoiding uplifting intentions of popular music and instead providing "space to think," a type of music which is potentially unwelcoming for the masses because it demands we re-think our relationships with music – hence the notion that new age, ambient and other similar genres are "intellectual" music (Hibbeth 2010: 300–301).

Even though an artist may consider that the content of their lyrics is important, or even constructs religious or philosophical ideas through their music, this does not entail they sacrifice the music and the beat. In fact, as my analysis will show in the next chapter, very often the beat is instrumental for the construction of the spiritual aesthetic. Below, RPK discusses his aesthetic preferences and how they have evolved over time:

> RPK: In fact originally I have made […] ethereal but pretty light stuff which, later on I've felt that [...] I want it to be like dark and like heavy and a little oppressive, the sound it's evolved a bit. I'm sure a lot of it comes from listening to electronic music [...] [I]n rap that feeling of danger and coldness and gloominess it creates its own kind of rap context compared to some party rap or nineties kind of ass shaking thing or something. It just somehow has spoken to me.
>
> *RPK: Itseasias alun perin mä oon tehny semmost […] eteeristä mut aika kevyttä kampetta mitä, mul on myöhemmin tullu et […] mä haluun et se on tavallaan darkkii ja semmost painavaa ja vähän painostavaaki se saundi et se on vähän kehittyny. Varmaan paljon konemusan kuuntelusta tullu se […] [R]äpissä semmonen vaaran tuntu ja semmonen kylmyys ja kolkkous ni se luo ihan omanlaisen räppikontekstin ku sit taas joku bileräppi tai ysäri semmone vitsin perseensheikkaushomma. Et se on vaan jotenki puhutellu mua.*
>
> (RPK i2015)

> RPK: I personally appreciate that kind of facelessness, anonymity, mysticism in music [...].
>
> *RPK: [M]ä ite fiilistelen musiikissa semmost kasvottomuutta, anonymiteettii, mystisyyttä […].*
>
> (Euro Crack i2015)

What RPK states above about preferring "facelessness" or anonymity in music making refers to his enjoyment of techno artists, some of which he mentioned by name during this interview, and of other electronic genres. In such genres, "representing" is not as crucial as in hip hop (cf. DJ Double M 2017) where origins and place of residence have a strong connection to artist persona, nor is personal history necessarily significant; instead, artists become more associated with a certain sound, technologies, genre, scene, and/or record label (see Demers 2010; Thornton 1995). In my interviews with the four Finnish rappers, none of them expressed strong attachments to a specific genre, or locality. They did, however, emphasize independence in production and in forming their personal tastes.

Mysticism was a term RPK used frequently to describe an aesthetic which leaves more to the imagination and is less "in your face" ("kaikki ei oo niin itsestään selvää ja in your face," "everything is not so self-evident and in your face"; Euro Crack i2015). RPK stated that he has different names for different projects which contain sounds that are more common in the world of electronic music (and less so in rap). Yet he also admitted that, while he mostly wishes to keep his two worlds, electronic and rap, separate, with Ceebrolistics he brought them together (RPK i2015). Related to mysticism and lyrics that discuss more abstract and philosophical ideas, RPK also mentioned having always been attracted to space related things and translating that into his music (Euro Crack i2015). Euro Crack uses the space trope frequently on their *Huume* ("Drug," Euro Crack 2013a) album, particularly in songs "Spaced Out," "Futuro," and "Mustavalo" ("Black light"), of which the latter two songs describe thinking about the future and a black hole, respectively (see also subchapter 5.1). Electronic music with its use of echoes and reverb and outerspace and futuristic themes, which have also been prominent in Afrofuturism and jazz (Hibbeth 2010: 304, fn. 4; St John 2013; Kolioulis 2015: 75–76), has frequently been associated with new spirituality and New Age (cf. St John 2013). As discussed earlier, in New Age, there are several predictions about a forthcoming "new age," a dystopian or utopian future.

Like Khid, RPK also connects "darkness" and "mystique" with his aesthetic preferences concerning rap and with his interest in electronic genres more generally (RPK i2015). He contrasts this with party rap, or "ass shaking" music as RPK

formulates his reference to the subgenre designed to make people dance (see Krims 2000: 55–57). RPK has sometimes constructed a discourse of anti-commercialism in his lyrics through criticism of mainstream rap (see e.g. Serkkupojat 2002; Srkkpjt 2004) and through sonic aspects such as highly synthesized dark beats, echoes, and deep bass which defies the standards of upbeat, more melodic pop music and pop rap. RPK describes above that he has been drawn to more ethereal and even cold, oppressive sounds. In fact, RPK has a song "Pidän tän darkkina" ("I keep it dark," RPK 2017) where the refrain repeats the title phrase praising (sonic) darkness. Khid seemingly has very similar aesthetic preferences, thus it does not seem surprising that they both described their collaboration as rather effortless (RPK i2015; Khid i2015).

Additionally, RPK has portrayed 90s boom bap as the opposite of his own music on several occasions, thus distinguishing himself from "classic" rap sounds. Also in my interviews, RPK underscored that his aesthetic preferences draw heavily from electronic music but his samples can come from almost anywhere; for example, the song "Ryöstö" (Euro Crack 2013a) samples the distorted guitar riff from "Iron Man," a song by the heavy metal group Black Sabbath. Also an interesting aesthetic point that RPK made in passing is the griminess or even explicitness of lyrics in Euro Crack's music (Euro Crack i2015). In the rap underground, this is perhaps even expected, as "nice" or lukewarm lyrics or sound may be categorized as too "pop" in the rap genre (see Krims 2000: 168): the audience may expect underground rap to feature "harder" music whereas the more mainstream lyrics have to be cleaner in order to appeal to a wider audience and pop radio. Similarly with sounds, darker for the underground and more melodic and upbeat for the overground.

This section has largely focused on the rappers' tastes in music. Thornton (1995) as well as Frith (1996) discuss taste hierarchies in connection to popular music, drawing from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital. The cultural knowledge of rap and other popular music genres affects and forms the taste of the listener. This acquired knowledge of music allows people to consider and portray themselves as having more refined tastes, hence elevating both their social status above the average consumer and the pleasure they acquire from music (Frith 1996: 9). This also facilitates the construction of exclusive forms of music (Frith 1996: 9), such as so-called alternative rap or underground rap and the associated scene. Similarly, the artists in this study construct their own tastes as leaning more towards alternative, "weird," or experimental sounds and genres. This is significant based on the argument made earlier that underground artists hold subcultural capital in defining tastes in the underground scene. Above, RPK and Khid exhibit (sub)cultural capital in the Bourdieusque sense, using "accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill" (Frith 1996: 9) to discern between types of music and to form hierarchies between so-called mainstream and non-mainstream music. These

"processes of discrimination" construct identities (Frith 1996: 18), and here, identities as alternative rap artists who differentiate themselves from mainstream rap.

Due to the rather large variety of influences in RPK's and Khid's music, it is impossible to classify them under specific genres – even though some songs on Khid's *Ohi* album (2016a), as Khid also himself mentions, draw heavily from grime. Khid's and RPK's productions draw from different sources, genres, and also sound art. Applying theorizations also regarding noise music (Hegarty 2008; Worby 2000) seems suitable here in analyzing this countercultural avant-gardist approach these two producer-artists have. For example, the music RPK is drawn to, as he explains above, is not uplifting or easy listening, and even if it is not necessarily noise music, either, RPK seemingly has a positive disposition towards noise and similar musical aesthetics based on my interpretation of his usage of the word "dark": noise can be threatening, transgressive, unconventional, and non-normative (Hegarty 2008: 13) because of the shared social understanding about noise as "unacceptable" and undesirable (Demers 2010: 92). Noise is thus the opposite of normative and well-liked forms of music. Similarly, RPK, Khid, and Ameeba assert that they are drawn to and make non-normative music; it appears more interesting perhaps because such music has less cultural-historical baggage than other genres of music and thus provides more material for creating something seemingly new and original.

The kind of music RPK purports to make ("dark," "heavy," "oppressive") could be seen to take rap back to its early aesthetics, as Rose (1994: 74–80) describes how "working in the red" to produce distorted booming sounds has been the desired sound in its earlier days. Cultural studies scholar Paul Hegarty (2008: 13) asserts that "something that brings noise [...] returns us to a lost origin of meaning, music, communality." It seems RPK also returns to the source of rap music making, to a more eclectic range of sounds than simply afrodiasporic genres, but also as noise connotes societal conflict and resistance (Worby 2000) which have been central themes in rap (e.g. Rose 1994). The aesthetic described by RPK is not necessarily dissonant or chaotic, but it clearly shies away from party rap or boom bap which often borrows from soul, disco, jazz, and generally groovy, uptempo and even melodic beats. Also, whereas boom bap is usually somewhere around 90bpm, beats made by RPK fall anywhere between 70 and 140 bpm. The terms "cold" and "dangerous," which RPK mentions, come closer to how noise music is described. Composer and sound artist Robert Worby (2000: 161) states that "[r]esonance, feedback and distortion are a crucial ingredient in noise music and, it would seem, in all radical pop music. Distortion is accumulation, overdrive and mutation at the limits of a system [...]." Underground rap based on my analysis becomes defined as oppositional, outside the ordinary, alternative – even "mutation of mutation" (RPK i2015). Most importantly, it is an attitude towards music which supports going outside the familiar range of sounds and genres.

Marshall (2001: 162) notes that "[a] recurring technique for establishing authenticity in popular music performance is the breaking of codes and the creation of new or transformed codes of style." In a similar way, the artists in this study claim that they prefer alternative soundscapes and do "their own thing" as they shun rap conventions. Seeking to differentiate oneself through style and "breaking of codes" is often used as a marker of authenticity (Marshall 2001: 162), and this originality also fits the personal-experiental authenticity discourse outlined in this study. This resonates strongly with the kind of distinctions that the four Finnish rappers have made when considering their status as "underground" and their understanding of popular music more generally – not to mention how they critique the ideology of rap authenticity (see also subchapter 6.2). Summarizing the present section, in Khid's discourse, popular music and culture become a form of oversimplified, consumeristic expression which has inbuilt emotions, easily understandable for the masses and hence boring and one-sided. For Ameeba, the sounds of the music in the radio are "wrong," superficial "cotton candy," meaning exaggeratedly upbeat and happy (Ameeba i2015a). On a different note, Julma Henri has dealt with controversial issues and criticized many aspects of the society in his music, and thus he acknowledges that someone might be offended by them and that his songs will not necessarily be played on "commercial" radio stations which according to Julma Henri must accommodate potential clients buying radio advertisements (as discussed in 6.1 below). RPK considers himself as knowledgeable of alternative music as he has acquired music and experiences from a broad range of electronic subgenres.

The current subchapter has examined how the Finnish rappers construct aesthetic discourses around alternative forms of rap, particularly concerning the categories of rap-rap and deep rap, braggadocious rapping about rapping or more "ethereal" and philosophical rap. When asking the artists about their music making processes and preferences, I had in mind the following idea which also Leman (1999: 286) mentions: "The ability to internally process and imagine sound is a central feature of musical creativity." Regarding the aesthetic side of their music, the artists first and foremost claim that they wish to retain the freedom to make rap-rap, deep rap, or any other type of rap. Additionally, Khid and RPK especially spoke about anonymity, mysticism, and facelessness as part of the aesthetic they are drawn to. Richardson and Gorbman (2013: 9) note that "in the digital age, anonymity is the preferred modus operandi for many, or performatively constructed ('fictional') and hybrid identity." It appears anonymity allows a certain artistic freedom of expression but also facilitates more personal storytelling which many underground artists seem to consider important (see Speers 2014; cf. Oravcová 2013). While the four Finnish rappers appear to be attracted to what they consider as non-normative music, and draw influences from experimental electronic music genres, they also describe their own music as non-normative. This "experimental" nature of their own music was

defined by the artists through its everyday sense, as departing from tradition, and rejecting demands of accessibility (cf. Demers 2010: 7). At the same time, the "mystical," "ethereal," or "gloomy" aesthetics in the artists' music become attached to its "deep" rapping, meaning spiritual or philosophical lyrics; in conclusion, spirituality in terms of sounds and/or lyrics can be considered as characterizing the form of underground rap made by the artists in this study, and as representing an alternative rap aesthetic.

5 Close readings of authenticity, spirituality, and atheism

This chapter focuses on three music videos by Ameeba, Euro Crack, and Khid, and the means (lyrical, sonic, visual) through which the discourses on new spirituality, atheism, and authenticity are constructed and connected in the audiovisual expression. In hip hop, like in other popular music genres, music videos have served an important role in defining the aesthetics of the culture as well its discourses. Music videos construct our image of the artist and shape our reception and perception of the song and its message; also, as Roy Shuker (2008: 121) argues, "[m]usical and visual stylistic aspects [...] produce particular ideological effects, a set of associations which situate the genre within the broader musical constituency." Music videos, like other audiovisual means, also highlight the constructedness of authenticity because they are so obviously manufactured (see Grossberg 1993: 204).

Interestingly, we often tend to attribute the content of music videos to the artist(s) performing the song although the videos are the result of multiple people and their collaboration and vision. Also the Finnish rap videos analyzed in this study were very much influenced by the people who shot them, while the rappers claimed that their own contribution to the script and editing was rather minimal. Still, as Carol Vernallis (2004: x) notes, the song usually precedes the video and thus influences it in many ways; directors typically take cues from the song when designing the video, and thus the video tends to "reflect the song's structure and pick up on specific musical features in the domains of melody, rhythm, and timbre." Additionally, the artists and their collaborators are part of a larger social, economic, and popular cultural framework, which complicates the notion of authorial agency in the creative process (cf. Grossberg 1993: 185). In this chapter, however, I am not analyzing these complex networks, processes, and agency, but instead the meanings and discourses constructed in the audiovisual world of the three music videos.

Below, I analyze Euro Crack's "Kräkkäkränkkä" in subchapter 5.1, Ameeba's "Vanhasielu" ("Old Soul") in subchapter 5.2, and Khid and RPK's "Luoti" ("Bullet") in subchapter 5.3. Each subchapter begins by briefly introducing the videos, followed by a detailed (and mostly chronological) close reading. Selected interview extracts are also used to compliment the analysis. Cue sheets with lyrics

to all songs can be found as appendices (Appendix 1–3). A standard verse length in rap songs is 16 or 32 bars, following the 4/4 beat, and generally, rap artists tend to structure songs based on bars; hence, the cue sheets of the songs also follow this structural unit.

5.1 "Kräkkäkränkkä": dealing consciousness

In this subchapter, I analyze how a discourse around drugs is used to construct spirituality through the music, lyrics, and visuals of Euro Crack's "Kräkkäkränkkä" music video (Euro Crack 2013c). The name of the song alludes to its refrain which repeats the words "kräkkää tää" and "kränkkää tää," "crack this" and "crank this" (turn up the volume), respectively (Euro Crack i2015). The song asks the listener to "crack" the philosophical idea served by Euro Crack in their music, which the rappers label as a drug. The rappers "deal" the listener an idea of being present in the here-and-now and achieving spiritual consciousness through focusing on the inside of their own mind. Sonically and visually, the song draws from the trap subgenre of hip hop, constructing a dark world where the two rappers become drug dealers working in a gloomy warehouse, cooking their "crack" which functions as a metaphor for their music's supposed addictive spiritual content. The structure of the song follows a verse-refrain form (AB) in which the song begins with the refrain and ends with a short instrumental outro. In the video, however, the outro is followed by a coda consisting of another song, thus the song structure is BABA'B outro + coda. Both verses (A and A') contain 32 bars but have slightly different arrangements in beat structure (see Appendix 1 for further details and lyrics). The song key is D minor and tempo 146 bpm. The song was written by RPK and Julma Henri, and produced by RPK.

The Euro Crack duo shot the "Kräkkäkränkkä" video (Euro Crack 2013c) in an abandoned limestone plant in the city of Lohja, Finland, in 2013. The duo first attempted to access the limestone building without authorization, and had to reschedule after receiving instructions from the security staff to apply for a permission to use the premises (Euro Crack i2015). The video was then shot a week later than originally planned in spring 2013. The video was released in July 2013 and was shot and produced by rap artist Thono Slono (Slowknow Production) and production company Napoleon Digital. The total length of the video is four minutes five seconds (04:05), including an excerpt of "Mustavalo" ("Black Light") song at the end (coda) which also features on their *Huume* (Euro Crack 2013a) album. The length of the "Kräkkäkränkkä" song (without the coda) is three minutes seventeen seconds (03:17).

In the first section below (5.1.1), some interview material further illustrates the idea behind Euro Crack's music as a drug inducing a spiritual "high."

5.1.1 Drug discourse

Perhaps the most prominent discourse that is visually constructed in "Kräkkäkränkkä" is the one about drugs. As stated by the duo in the interview extract below, Euro Crack's musical concept is built around drug dealing as a metaphor for transmitting spiritual ideas. Specifically, Euro Crack not only features a highly addictive substance (crack cocaine) in its name but uses the drug metaphor elaborately to describe being "under the influence" of spiritual ideas and experiences in lyrics and music and, as I argue below, also visually.

Drug discourse more generally is strongly related to new spirituality: current forms of new spirituality have their roots in the 1960s' countercultural milieu where drugs played an important role in shaping the spiritual culture of that time (see e.g. Versluis 2014). "Expanding consciousness" with drugs such as LSD have been used to alter states of mind and can cause experiences of assimilation with the surroundings, a sense of losing yourself. This is arguably a reason why it is used as a metaphor by Euro Crack as they encourage their listeners to alter their consciousness through their music which they call "dope" ("douppi") or drug ("huume"). Recreational drug usage has been strongly connected to popular music from 1960s' "sex, drugs, and rock'n roll" to late twentieth century rave and club scenes (Kotarba & Vannini 2009: 34–38; Thornton 1995; see also Till 2010;) and beyond. The discourse around drugs and popular music has often centered around drug usage as deviant behavior, many conservatives suggesting that music may cause such behavior (Kotarba & Vannini 2009: 34). Considering also the general societal concern over the use of substances, cultural references to drugs will certainly be familiar to and even provoke listeners. Countercultural ideas are naturally more prevalent in underground rap than in mainstream forms, thus the drug metaphor can also be seen as contributing to Euro Crack's transgressive image and perhaps adding to their underground credibility.

Taking these prevalent ideas about drugs (and music) as harmful and addictive is adapted to characterize Euro Crack's music as "dealing consciousness," as explained by the duo below:

> INKA: If you had to describe or explain what is Euro Crack?
> RPK:[…] it's like music branded as a drug. That's it, simply. It's even kind of like life is the best drug kind of thing [laughs].
> JULMA HENRI: [laughs] Yes.
> RPK: If you listen to the Euro Crack album, the album's name is Huume [drug] and that's like bad bad but there is not once any talk about doing drugs in reality. It's all music.
> JULMA HENRI: Yeah and there is that kind of consciousness dealing stuff.

INKA: Jos teiän pitäis kuvailla tai selittää että mikä on Euro Crack?
RPK: […]se on ihan musaa brändätty huumeeks. That's it, yksinkertasesti. Se on jopa aika semmone elämä on parasta huumetta läppä. [naurahtaa]
JULMA HENRI: [nauraa] Kyllä.
RPK: Jos Euro Cracki levyy kuuntelee, se levyn nimi on Huume ja se on niinku bad bad mut siel ei kertaakaan puhuta mistään doussaamisesta oikeesti. Se on kaikki sitä musaa.
JULMA HENRI: Nii ja kyllä siinä on semmosta tietoisuuden diilaamis juttua.

(Euro Crack i2015)

RPK openly states that Euro Crack's music is branded as a drug, yet denies it has anything to do with actual drug usage. RPK references the idea that "life is the best drug" which is a rather positive notion suggesting that it is possible to get "high" just by enjoying life, and, in the above context, by enjoying Euro Crack's music.[66] Above, RPK thus suggests that Euro Crack's music does not have any detrimental ideas behind it nor does it have malicious consequences, as the duo does not encourage drug usage but spirituality. In this same interview, Julma Henri added that for example the drug usage references "take a hit" ("ota hitit") and "hold it in" ("pidä sisäs") in their lyrics transmit this idea of spiritual consciousness or awareness infiltrating the listener through Euro Crack's music and the listener is encouraged to absorb their ideas and effects (Euro Crack i2015). These lyrical references can be found in the lyrics of their *Huume* album's similarly titled opening song (Euro Crack 2013a), as can the line "dope stuff that's not a vice" ("douppi matsku joka ei oo pahe") which accentuates the idea that their "drug" music is not morally dubious. Instead, the listener can get "high" on the spirituality of their music.[67] Interestingly, the album's lead single "Kräkkäkränkkä" does not contain lyrical references to drugs, although the video features plenty.

Creating a concept around spirituality and drugs was not, however, the sole idea behind Euro Crack. As was discussed in subchapter 4.3, the duo also explained that

[66] However, the phrase may also be an implicit reference to a former, similarly titled Finnish NGO (Elämä on parasta huumetta ry) which had a continuous campaign against substance abuse in the 1990s and 2000s, encouraging especially young people to say no to drugs. The NGO's activities included also promotional concert tours with rappers and other popular artists around that time. The NGO merged with the two NGOs Elämäntapaliitto ry and Terveys-Hälsan ry in 2011 to form EHYT (organization for drug prevention). For more information, see Ehyt ry (nd.).

[67] Crack and getting high as a metaphor have of course been used in rap music before. For example, the Midwest US rap artist Twista assimilates his flow with getting high on crack in his song "Mista Tung Twista" (Cheney 2010: 322).

they wanted to produce "fresh sounds," presumably referring to trap influences, by following the current trends in the US rap scene where trap has become the prevalent style, and bringing these trends to Finland (Euro Crack i2015). They also stated that their idea was to make "rap-rap" but given their previous musical style(s), both ended up integrating deeper content and conscious lyrics into the concept. This idea of "trendiness" also included adding visuals to their performances – hence their frequent collaboration with VJ and visual artist Sellekhanks around 2013–2015 – and various merchandise (hoodies, beanies etc.) (Euro Crack i2015). Although the trap sound has become ubiquitous also in Finnish rap by the end of 2010s, in the beginning of the decade when Euro Crack released their EP (JLMA HNRI x RPK 2012) and debut album (Euro Crack 2013a), the duo was still one of the few utilizing such influences in their music. RPK stated that whereas his previous aim has been to make music which is timeless ("ajatonta"), he deliberately wanted to create a "trendy" album with Euro Crack (Euro Crack i2015). RPK also highlighted that when producing and making music, he is very conscious about the fact that the beat and lyrics are for Euro Crack (instead of some other artist) and that this influences the outcome significantly (Euro Crack i2015).

The "Kräkkäkränkkä" video reflects and highlights the music-as-drug concept behind Euro Crack and the name of their first album entitled *Huume* ("Drug," Euro Crack 2013a). The most obvious drug association is crack as it is featured in the duo's name. Historically, crack cocaine is tied to the complexities of postindustrial United States (e.g. Neal 2004; Rose 2008: 48–51): selling it has been a means of survival in the ghetto, a quasi-necessary part of life if one wants to make a decent living (cf. Kelley 1996: 125; cf. Bogazianos 2011: 54). Crack is highly addictive, and due to the cultural history of this drug in the US ghettoes where hip hop has thrived, in the street parlance the selling of records or more generally "the rap game" became synonymous with selling crack ("the crack game," see Bogazianos 2011: 70). As hip hop scholar Mark Anthony Neal (2004: 368–369) observes, "craving for the type of stimulant that crack cocaine provided made it popular among those who desired transcendence from the everyday misery of postindustrial life" (cf. also Rose 2008: 46). This analogy is also at play with Euro Crack, their music seemingly offering transcendence from everyday life to a spiritual world. Euro Crack provides a spiritual message through their music or their "crack" which serves as a necessary means out of a dire situation in which people experience alienation and depression, poverty and sickness, leading to (spiritually) unsatisfying lives, as expressed in the lyrics of the songs on their *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a). The "Euro" part in Euro Crack's name localizes the duo into Europe but also hints at the money-making tropes attached to drug trade as well as music business (euro being the official currency in Finland and most member states of the European Union). Today, the drug discourse is at the heart of the most commercially successful subgenre of hip

hop, trap, which is also close to the aesthetics of Euro Crack's music, as will be discussed below.

In the following sections, I read the "Kräkkäkränkkä" music video through analyzing its drug discourse and how it is employed to construct spirituality audiovisually. The sections below will focus on analyzing the themes of music-as-drug/music making-as-drug dealing or the "crack" trap (5.1.2), being under the influence (5.1.3), and otherworldliness (5.1.4). However, the lyrics in "Kräkkäkränkkä" are not as explicitly spiritual as some other Julma Henri or Euro Crack songs nor do they directly mention anything related to drugs which are the central ideas behind Euro Crack's music and their *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a). A close listening of the concept album is required if we wish to grasp these discursive ideas, which is also why I have referenced other songs of the album in my analysis.

5.1.2 Entering the trap

The music and rapping start instantaneously in the "Kräkkäkränkkä" video, facilitating an immediate immersion into its visual world. The first phrase we hear is "when Euro Crack is here" ("ku Euro Crack on täällä") while in the video we first see a concrete wall, then the dark, dusty industrial plant or warehouse, and the rapping duo; they are indeed "here." The two rappers are seen in the middle of the hall in front of a table, on top of which there is a white plastic bag and an unidentifiable black object, likely RPK's midi controller seen in later scenes in the video (see **Figure 4** below). The floor beneath the rappers is moving in a surreal manner and debri is falling from the ceiling. There are also graffitis on the walls contributing to the urban feel of the video. The entire coloring of the video is tilted towards a mixture of cool blue and violet that appears to further add to the cold, metallic clang of the synthesized beats which the blinking, blurring, twitchy images occasionally using slow-motion further accentuate. All these effects together suggest that the video's world is not part of our everyday reality, but rather, that we are witnessing something otherworldly or transcendent which distorts our perceptions, perhaps being under the influence of drugs (cf. Pääkkölä 2016: 167). The vocals are doubled and their pitch is lowered and manipulated with the help of reverb to sound slightly robotic and mechanical, which constructs a futuristic and ominous atmosphere, even intimidating spacyness, as though a higher power is speaking, the voice booming and bouncing from the walls.

Figure 4. "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): Euro Crack duo in the middle of the ominous industrial hall, the floor moving, and debri falling from the ceiling (00:02).

The lyrics then continue: "it's not enough that you are here you have to understand you have to be present" ("ei riitä et oot tässä sun pitää kässää sun pitää olla läsnä"), demanding the viewer-listener to not only passively observe but to place their focus on the current moment. The refrain repeats the words "kräkkää tää" and "kränkkää tää," "crack this" and "crank this." As explained by the artists (Euro Crack i2015), the first line refers to decoding the message of the song (see section 5.1.5 below), whereas the latter encourages to turn up the volume, "crank it up"; the loud, bass-heavy volume has always been central to the hip hop expression (Rose 1994), and thus "cranking it up" in Euro Crack's song can be said to establish hip hop genre codes.

Each refrain consists of two nearly identical parts (8+8 bars), with slight alterations in the accompaniment.[68] In the beginning of the song, during the first part (bars 1–8) of the first refrain, only the synthesizer riff plays, mostly following the melody of rapping. There are no drums yet except for an occasional quiet ride cymbal in the background reminiscent of a bell ringing (at 00:06–00:07 and again at 00:16–00:17). During the latter part of this introductory refrain (bars 9–16), the bass joins in along with an added layer of synthesizers playing an octave higher than the original riff.

[68] In fact, all three songs ("Kräkkäkränkkä," "Vanhasielu," "Luoti") analyzed in this present chapter 5 have a similar 8+8 bar-structure in the refrain, with little ("Vanhasielu") or no difference ("Luoti") in the two parts in terms of the lyrics and accompaniment (see appendices).

These two 8-bar-long parts further consist of two different sections (4+4 bars). While the first four bars of each section (bars 1–4 and 9–12) follow the song's standard 4/4 beat, the beat structure during the latter four bars in both sections (bars 4–8 and 13–16) differs: these "kräkkää tää" ("crack this") and "kränkkää tää" ("crank this") parts follow a 3/3/2 rhythmic pattern (as if two measures in 3/4 beat and one in 2/4 beat instead of two regular 4/4 beats). These rhythmically differing sections also rely on the repetition of these two words, and phonetically particularly the 'ä' vowel (reminiscent of nasal 'a') and double 'k' consonant. The synthesizer riff accentuates the strong mantra-like repetition of these words, reinforcing the message of cracking and cranking Euro Crack's music, as it also follows the melody of the rapping. In this way, the key ideas of the song are "hammered" into the subconscious of the listener already from the very beginning of the song as this "additional" refrain precedes the first verse. The looped beat has multiple layers, but the synthesizers are the most prominent element, arguably functioning more as drums together with the actual (programmed) drums than as a melodic part of the overall backing track. The beat also uses reverb and a bit of delay in a way that is reminiscent of the sound effects of lazer guns or "phasers" in sci-fi movies, the electric snare kick slightly "dropping down" together with the synthesizer, which further highlights the otherworldly, spacy feel of the song. RPK has admitted that he is a fan of everything related to space (Euro Crack i2015), and indeed similar sounds can be detected in most, if not all, of his productions.

Sonically, the song is influenced by trap particularly in terms of the drum programming and prominent layered synthesizers. Trap can be considered as a subgenre of hip hop and southern US rap which has developed particularly in Atlanta, Georgia. Over the past decade, trap has become the dominant form of rap in the hip hop mainstream. Besides high levels of lyrical content focused on drug dealing, the trap subgenre makes use of high-tempo, rhythmically racy hi-hats accelerating up to sixty-fourth notes and beyond, overpowering bass sound often utilizing or imitating Roland's classic 808 drum machine, typically sharp and "dry" snare drums and layered synthesizers, "chilly cinematic strings," and ad-libs and often triplet flows[69] in the rapping (Raymer 2012; see also Burton 2017; 2016). Like in "Kräkkäkränkkä," the typical tempo of trap is around 140 bpm (or half-time, ca. 70 bpm). The piercing, echoing sound and stuttering of the synthesized drums in the "Kräkkäkränkkä" song are also a familiar element in grime and many subgenres of electronic music that draw from hip hop. In "Kräkkäkränkkä," particularly the

[69] The triplet flow or ad-libs are utilized somewhat seldomly by the artists in this study, likely because this kind of flow is now characteristic of much of mainstream rap to a point of being the subject of parody (for example in NBC's comedy show *Saturday Night Live*).

recurring synth riff along with the hi-hats are foregrounded. When watching music videos, the space also affects how we hear the sounds, and watching Euro Crack in the dark industrial plant with walls made of concrete renders the reverb and echos of the beats seemingly louder, as though they were multiplied by bouncing from the walls. The sounds thus highlight the visual griminess or dirtiness of the dusty, gloomy warehouse and make the rappers further appear as dangerous, shady characters in an urban industrial setting.

More importantly, the term "trap" has been used to refer to a location where drug deals take place (cf. e.g. Burton 2017). Trap can be used in a broad sense "to describe the drug trade itself, as well as the particular psychic state –a blend of paranoia and megalomania– that tends to accompany long-term employment as a dealer" (Raymer 2012). Hence, trap sounds often make cultural references to drug discourse.[70] The Euro Crack duo has referred to themselves as dealers on their *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a) who came to "cook dope" (see the song "Huume" on the album). Thus, they can be seen to construct a "trap" in the "Kräkkäkränkkä" video, a place where they sell their drug (their music). The two rappers are almost constantly centered in the video and shot mostly from middle range, which also centers their agency as artists and as "dope dealers." They are often looking at the camera except when they are bagging their CDs for sale or when RPK uses his controller; on these instances, close ups are used which also accentuates their roles as artist-dealers.

As Tricia Rose (2008: 77) observes, there are several stereotypic notions being constructed in hip hop about the prominence of violence, abuse, and crime in the lives of black people and rappers, but there is also an undeniable "prestige and market power associated with these versions of black reality." From this version of hip hop, Euro Crack adopts particularly the drug dealing; thus their spiritual message becomes more marketable to those familiar with US hip hop and trap aesthetics and conventions. It should also be noted here that some of Julma Henri's previous music has focused on substance abuse and related social problems; he has suggested in interviews that those lyrics draw heavily from real life experiences around drugs, which arguably affords authenticity for his character and performance in Euro Crack.[71]

The first seconds of the "Kräkkäkränkkä" video provide a sense of linear time as the music and visuals progress together, much like in music videos more generally.

[70] In trap songs, the discourse is often additionally highlighted via lyrics and ad-libs which reference cooking crack, for example. Euro Crack's songs, however, are not "pure" trap in this sense, as they feature few ad-libs, most of which consist of standard hip hop interjections such as "yeah", "yo" etc.

[71] See particularly albums *Al-Qaida Finland* (Julma Henri & Syrjäytyneet 2007) and *SRJTNT vol 1.* (Julma Henri & Syrjäytyneet 2008). Of the interviews where he references his past with drugs see for example Hurula (2010).

This sense of linearity is broken at 00:06 when we see a quick flash of what appears to be black-and-white surveillance camera footage which claims that we are already at 00:42 in the video. During this refrain-long introductory part, the artists are not yet lip-synching, which also tells us that we are outside of diegesis. There are slightly fewer narrative elements in the video's visual world compared to for example the variety displayed in Ameeba's "Vanhasielu" where we see different colors, animals, and activities (see 5.2). In "Kräkkäkränkkä," the dark coloring is omnipresent, the rappers are constantly in the same space, the industrial hall, and the only actions apart from hand gestures that we see the rappers undertaking are bagging CDs and RPK manipulating his controller. Moving of dust is also a recurring trope: Julma Henri makes sweeping gestures twice to mark how he cleansed his mind ("I swept my temple," "mun temppelii lakasin" at 01:07; "maybe cleansed the mind," "mielen kai puhisti" at 01:11). Indeed, visually the act of moving dust is constant in the video, perhaps to "wipe the dust" from our beliefs and conceptions about the nature of reality, helping the mind to see clearer, or perhaps alluding to powder drugs; either the rappers clap their hands, jump on the dusty floor, or wipe or blow dust off surfaces. The transition from each refrain is emphasized visually by a dust cloud.

In the video, the two artists are not seen walking but they are constantly moving with loose, wavy bounces originating in the hip and knees, occasionally also jumping up and down to the beat. Both rappers use hand gestures (pointing, waving etc.) to accentuate their rapping and their message; they lipsync their own verses, and partially the refrains. Both Julma Henri and RPK stress the rhyming words throughout the song, also in the refrain. RPK is wearing a dark T-shirt, somewhat discreet jewelry on his hands and what appears to be a prayer bead necklace and a Palestine scarf on his head. In some shots, he wears a dark Adidas track suit jacket with white stripes on the sleeves, a fisher hat, and sunglasses. Especially when manipulating his controller, he is seen wearing a grey track suit jacket with black and white sleeve stripes and a hood over his head. Julma Henri is seen wearing a black Euro Crack college shirt and a jacket plus white ski mask, while in some shots he wears a long, black oversized collar shirt. Both rappers wear oversized black trousers. On the whole, the rappers are wearing standard hip hop style of clothing, perhaps apart from RPK's necklace highly reminiscent of prayer beads which suggests that spirituality is part of his artist image.[72]

As stated, the refrain of the song serves as an introduction. The refrain and the name of the "Kräkkäkränkkä" song reference the two "Finglish" words for

[72] Prayer beads are common among Muslim rappers. I wish to thank Anders Ackfeldt for drawing my attention to the necklace.

"cracking" and "cranking."[73] Using words twisted from English is ubiquitous in Finnish rap and slang more generally. During the part of the introductory refrain where these two lines are repeated several times (00:07–00:12), a wall with what appear to be meters and switches, and the Euro Crack logo next to the word KRÄKKÄ which then switches into KRÄNKKÄ, appear in the middle of screen. An electricity bolt divides the image in half vertically and we also hear simulated electricity crackling, perhaps suggesting that the duo's message has power behind it and to instill respect or even fear as we are culturally conditioned to think that electricity is potentially dangerous. Electricity more generally has been attributed with mysterious and supernatural qualities in popular cultural imagination (despite its occurrence in the natural world) (Van Riper 2002: 69–71).

The other half of the duo, Julma Henri, is then displayed wearing a ski mask, his trademark accessory. We can see him grinning which reveals that he has shiny grills in his mouth, a typical flashy hip hop accessory, while he bags a CD like he would a portion of a drug (such as crack) that he is about to sell (at 00:15). In Julma Henri's case, due to his frequent criticism of capitalism and mainstream rap in his music (see particularly 6.1 in this study), the grills appear more as parodying mainstream rap's focus on appearance, bling, and designer clothes than as actual fondness of expensive accessories. Underground rappers may achieve credibility via down to earth appearance and anonymity, thus using accessories associated with mainstream rap can serve as criticism (Hess 2005b).

We then see RPK standing next to some kind of a switchboard, reaching for a handle, and hear a simulated sound of electricity, now louder than when we saw the wall with the song title. In the next shot (at 00:22), there are three separate billboards, "We sell crack 24 hrs" in white, and the Euro Crack logo and an arrow in neon violet (see **Figure 5** below) next to what appears to be a vending booth. Soon also the duo is seen standing inside the booth. It then becomes evident that RPK used the handle to (seemingly) turn on the power of the sign, functioning as a cue for the viewer that the video – and crack selling – is about to begin. The billboard signs were clearly added in post-production.

[73] The name is possibly also a(n ironic) reference to Finnish schlager singer Mikko Alatalo's song "Känkkäränkkä" (1981).

Figure 5. "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): The signs next to the crack vending booth before the Euro Crack duo enters (00:22).

The Euro Crack logo is made of one reversed euro sign and one letter C (for the E and C in Euro Crack), forming a mock of the Chanel symbol with two Cs. The symbol can equally be interpreted as a critique against or parody of mainstream rap's obsession with high-end designer clothes and other symbols of financial success and capitalism, like the grills Julma Henri is wearing. Indeed, the two rappers do not purport to be above society's capitalist structures despite their spiritual message but rather take advantage of those structures and the "commercial gaze" of music business (Hess 2005b: 309). This introductory part of the video, with the rappers inside the vending booth and placing their product (their CDs) into bags, suggests that we are about to witness them selling their "crack" to us, thus they, too, take part in the capitalist structures of society when transmitting their message to us. The video arguably represents the underground rap duo's "sense of cultural ownership and at the same an understanding of their music as commodity" (Hess 2005b: 309).

Importantly, the Euro Crack logo seen in the video is purple, and the video as a whole has many shades of purple as well. In the context of the many blatant references to drug discourse in the video and Euro Crack's music more generally, this can be interpreted to allude to purple drank or "lean," a recreational drug of codeine cough syrup and lemon soda mixed with Jolly Rancher candy which has become ubiquitous in hip hop culture over the past two decades. The drink is considered to have been particularly influential in the "drowsy" sound of Houston's chopped and screwed style of rap and some other forms of southern US hip hop, mostly notably lowered pitch of vocals and slowed tempo (Westhoff 2011: 62, 65),

"bordering on psychedelia" (Westhoff 2011: 67) and making "menacing songs sound more menacing" (Westhoff 2011: 68). The same shade of purple has been seen in many hip hop videos drawing from southern hip hop aesthetics (such as A$AP Rocky's "Purple Swag," 2011). The characteristic lowered pitch of the vocals of Houston rap is also present in the refrain of "Kräkkäkränkkä" although the tempo remains unaffected. Although Euro Crack's song cannot be characterized to share many musical similarities to chopped and screwed, the larger hip hop culture with its endorsement of alcohol and drug use is a clear influence; while the rappers are not actually seen consuming or handling any drugs or alcohol, the visuals described here build on hip hop's drug discourse. Purple drank has been referred to in numerous rap songs, and also "purple kush," a purple variant of cannabis, has received several references in rap music which celebrates weed and other substances.

I am also here reminded of Rose's (2014) and Michael P. Jeffries' (2011: 6) insights among many other scholars that when dealing with hip hop, we are always dealing with afrodiasporic cultural, musical and visual aesthetics no matter the geographic location: even when we are looking at white non-US rappers, their aesthetics are drawing from black aesthetics, which makes it imperative to consider these origins. Finnish rappers are aware of their cultural distance to the US and thus also Euro Crack' s "crack" metaphor and trap influences have clear parodic elements, making it somewhat evident that they do not purport to actually be dealers while they make elaborate use of the associations culturally constructed between hip hop and drugs. Kotarba and Vannini (2009: 37–38) among others note that particular drugs have been associated with particular styles of music, for example ecstasy with dance music and crack with rap.

This beginning of the video and the first verse of the song portrays the rappers in the dark hall space they are perhaps not supposed to be in (suggested also by the surveillance camera effects used in the video), highlighting that the rappers are somewhere "underground." The rough industrial environment connects the video to urban life, while the graffitis, which the rappers are also briefly shown to paint (at 01:32 in the middle of the second refrain), the collapsed structures and the simulated drug dealing all underscore a connection to hip hop ghetto authenticity where power and respect are a result of the rapper's assumed ability to make money by any means necessary in harsh environments (Jeffries 2011: 62–63, 66–67); the space in the music video thus becomes converted into hip hop's natural habitat and the rappers its natural inhabitants. Jeffries (2011: 180) points out that for some people, deprivation is integral to the definition of a thug, but in this video, that deprivation is rather depicted as poverty of the soul and mind than material lack, as represented by Euro Crack's hustle as "dope" (consciousness) dealing "gangsta" rappers.

Furthermore, the transgression into a space outside of everyday life highlights the shadiness and danger of that space, contributing to a feel of the "street" realities,

thugs, drug dealers, and gangsters. The rappers are seen to place their album entitled "Huume" ("drug") into Minigrip see-through plastic bags on various occasions during the video, which is typical imagery of "hustling," a way to survive the daily hardships in poor urban neighborhoods and make money in order to survive. Their *Huume* album, like a portion of crack or weed, was sold in these plastic bags upon its release, further underlining the analogy. The rappers are thus at work in the video (cf. Bogazianos 2011: 54), highlighting the "crack game – rap game" analogy. As criminologist Dimitri Bogazianos (2011: 78) observes, "in rap's conflict with its own commercialization, crack serves as a bridge connecting a white-collar industry [...] and a street industry [...]" meaning that rap artists equate the brutality of the music industry with the brutality of drug dealing. It is possible to see this analogy at play here, too, with the two underground rappers in the dark hall of the limestone plant with hard-hitting beats in the background. Unlike cocaine, crack is also a "low-level enterprise" (Bogazianos 2011: 2) as it is much cheaper, thus perhaps more suitable for smaller underground artists. Note however that the rappers are never seen actually providing their "crack" (their CD) to anyone in the video, thus their hustle remains legitimate in every sense.

5.1.3 Under the influence

The "Kräkkäkränkkä" music video suggests that Euro Crack's music functions like a drug, causing a spiritually altered consciousness which is visually represented as twitchy and blurry images with occasionally changing colors. Also some of the other music videos by Euro Crack ("Douppiidouppaa," Euro Crack 2013d; "Spacedout," Euro Crack 2013e) have a visual appearance that can be read to simulate the state of being under the influence of drugs, particularly perhaps hallucinogenic drugs which have often been linked with music (Till 2010: 35). This is done by using effects such as blinking, blurring, and (RGB) color manipulation. The drug discourse is thus effectively connected to their music on both linguistic and visual level to suggest an altered consciousness. This kind of visual surrealism can be seen as a deconstructive strategy, demanding that we rethink and reformulate our understanding about the nature of reality and what we think we know (cf. Richardson 2012: 75).

Till (2010: 3) notes that drug use has often been associated with religious or cult environments which are "outside of the 'normal'." Also, as Till (2010: 35) states, "some religious practice aims to achieve altered (or 'higher') states of consciousness […] [d]rug taking is a short cut that allows those within Western culture who have few skills in this area to achieve such states […]." Euro Crack portrays their music as this kind of short cut to such a state, claiming on their *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a) that listening to their music can help reach spiritual awareness. Throughout the "Kräkkäkränkkä" video, the rappers point to their heads when speaking of

mind(s), visually accentuating the mind-altering impact their music supposedly has on the listener. Psychiatrist Arthur Kleinman (see Till 2010: 35) further argues that in the West, altered (or extended) states of consciousness are not regarded as worthwhile exploring, and he criticizes a supposed Western lack of ability to live in the moment or to be fully immersed, Westerners being prone to dualistic disconnectivity instead. Religious studies scholar Richard King (1999: 22) also criticizes the irrationality associated with experiences that are outside the everyday lifeworld and draws our attention to the fact that in some religious traditions such as Buddhism, they may be considered "natural":

> […][C]ontemporary Westerners do not normally take these states as 'normative' if they consider them at all. When such experiential states are discussed they are usually rejected as delusory, subjective and hallucinatory, or are described as 'altered' states of consciousness – a phrase that presupposes the normative nature of so-called 'everyday' experiences. In some religious traditions, however (especially Buddhism and classical Yoga), such 'altered' states are sometimes taken to be the normative and 'natural' states of mind, and it is the everyday states of waking and dreaming etc., that are somehow an 'alteration' of or an aberration from that norm.

Besides the overall visual look suggesting altered perception, another reference to the drug discourse comes during the first verse when Julma Henri raps "Euro crack snapback boomerang" and appears to throw a red-and-white pill where the Eurocrack sign and text is written (at 00:40, see **Figure 6** below). The pill is identical to a now sold-out USB-stick containing their *Huume* album in mp3 format which was available at their webstore, whereas the term "snapback" likely not only refers to Julma Henri's abrupt physical gesture but also to a type of baseball cap with a straight brim, common in hip hop fashion, and which was also sold at their web store along with other clothing. Prescription drugs used for pain or anxiety such as Percocet and Xanax have become ubiquitous in rap[74] much like other drugs, thus the insinuation to pills here is not lost on rap listeners. Julma Henri's act of throwing Euro Crack's music to the listener to use like a medicine for increasing spiritual awareness is further complicated by the term "boomerang"; it may well refer to Buddhist ideas Julma Henri has shared in interviews that spreading spiritual knowledge is mutually beneficial (Julma Henri i2015), thus karmic favors return like a boomerang when he shares the spiritual message through music.

[74] See for example Atlanta rapper Future's "Mask Off" (Future 2017). Percocet is an opioid painkiller, and Xanax is a benzodiazepine which is used for reducing anxiety.

Figure 6. "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): Euro Crack throwing the boomerang pill for the viewer to consume (00:40).

Accelerating programmed drums introduce the first verse (A, bars 17–48) of the song. A synthesizer riff and the sparse drums apart from occasional accelerating hi-hat accents are backed by a 4/4 bass. Around the middle of the verse (bars 33–40), the synth riff is replaced with a xylophone style of synthesizer melody with added ping-pong style delay, then switching back to the first riff (bars 41–48). Julma Henri delivers this first verse, using mostly on-beat accents in his rapping and following the tempo.

The opening line of the first verse, "I swear on the name of dharma not drama" ("vannon dharman en draaman nimeen"), immediately reveals the spiritual realm that the rappers are conveying with this song. *Dharma* is a central concept used in Indian religious thought, for example in Buddhism and Hinduism. It has multiple significations, such as behavior that is in accordance with the order of all things and a right way of living, or Buddha's teaching. Religious studies scholar Klaus K. Klostermaier (1998: 5) characterizes its meaning in Hinduism as "the universal law that is believed to govern everything and that existed even before the creation." Hindus themselves have traditionally called Hinduism *vaidika dharma*, vedic *dharma* (Klostermaier 1998: 5). *Veda* refers to knowledge which can be found in canonical literature that was written down based on oral tradition and further edited by scholars and gurus (Klostermaier 1998: 5). Considering Julma Henri's assertion (discussed in chapter 4) that he has mostly been drawn to Buddhism, the lyrical reference can be interpreted to refer to Buddhist teachings. The rhyming word Julma Henri uses for "dharma" and "drama" is "karma," which he calls "dangerous," further connecting the message of the songs to Indian religious beliefs about the causalities and repercussions of our actions and their connections to transcendent powers.

During the first verse, we are lead to believe that Julma Henri reveals his face as he rolls his ski mask, but instead, we see a golden skull while the text "x-ray on" is displayed (at 00:51, see **Figure 7** below). He utters simultaneously "lift those fences see my face there" ("nosta aidat pois näät mun naaman noin"). The horror movie moment seems to suggest that Julma Henri is a dead ghost, empty inside. The imagery reminds the viewer of the impermanence of the self, as Julma Henri's familiar mask suddenly reveals an unfamiliar ghostly figure, evoking the Freudian uncanny and fear and insecurity related to death (cf. Partridge 2015: 61–64). In this context, however, this ghostly image should perhaps not be read as a reference to physical death but to detaching from identification with a mind-made self (much like in Julma Henri's song "Kutsu" discussed above in 4.1.2) and thus allowing this "false" self to perish. In Buddhism, it is believed that there is no inherent, permanent core in things, thus existence is characterized by impermanence and there is no self. The deconstruction of such "illusions" as the self and body are ways towards so-called enlightened consciousness. Here, the visual reference seems close to Buddhism's teachings about emptiness (*shunyata*) and absence of self (*anatman*) (see Versluis 2014: 230). This interpretation is further supported by RPK's line "my direction is to reach emptiness" ("suuntani on päästä tyhjään") as he points upwards to the black ceiling behind him later in the video (at 02:31) during his verse. It should be noted that the idea of no-self and other Buddhist teachings have also manifested in new spirituality (Versluis 2014: 176 –179, 230–231, 236–249).

Figure 7. "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): X-ray vision reveals a golden skull as Julma Henri removes his mask, suggesting impermanence of self (00:51).

Further, Julma Henri's line in his verse "I live in a different world than you, you see a lot but I see nothing" ("elän eri maailmas ku sinä, sä näät vaikka mitä mutta mä en nää mitään") can mean that he is somehow outside the everyday understanding of existence, or society and the law, and because he "knows" the fundamental truth about the illusionary and impermanent nature of existence, he "sees nothing." This can also allude to Julma Henri having transcended death, a necessary condition for "true" limitless consciousness, thus he is living but in a sense which is different from the everyday understanding. Julma Henri in his verse thus encourages us to remove any obstacles ("fences") out of the way in order to see the "real" him and the truth about existence. In addition to impermanence or emptiness, compassion is another important teaching in Buddhism in addition to the no-self doctrine; they are strongly connected and have also traveled to New Age along with many other Buddhist teachings (Versluis 2014: 244–247). Julma Henri seems to allude to this idea of compassion as he raps "taught myself to feel sorry for the elderly and handicapped" ("opettelin säälii näit vanhuksii ja vammasii").

Julma Henri also raps that "concepts" ("käsitteet") and "energies" ("energiat") are holding things together, which can be interpreted as him saying that our illusionary world would collapse as soon as we let go of ordinary ideas. Ideas about the existence of a variety of energies or powers and of a dynamic interconnectedness of all things are central in Eastern religions as well as in many forms of New Age and new spirituality; a frequently recurring belief in these systems of thought is also that life forces resonate with each other, acting as causal agents and manifesting in various forms (in humans, as events etc.). These energies are believed to have both destructive as well as healing qualities, and are frequently part of the holistic framework of new spirituality. (See Brown 2006: 139; cf. Hanegraaff 1996: 125, 152, 175.)

Another one of Julma Henri's lines in "Kräkkäkränkkä," "you've received that good stuff pass it on to the left for the rest" ("oot saanu hyvät passaa vasemmalle muillekin") appears to be a call for spiritual activism and altruism. Julma Henri mentioned in my interview that he has chosen to portray spiritual ideas in his music because he wants to share the benefits he himself gained: "if you've received something yourself, you [want to] share it with others" ("jos on itte saanu jotaki niin antaa siitä muilleki," Julma Henri i2015). Versluis (2014: 186) states that the spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle "suggests, in *A New Earth*, that the purpose of those who have spiritually awakened is to nurture an emerging, spiritually illuminated culture" – and Euro Crack seems to preach the same notion here. In the video, this line is uttered when the artists shove their albums inside the plastic bags and then pile them on top of each other, thus making it clear that the "good stuff" to pass along refers to their music with its spiritual message. Considering the pill Julma Henri threw in the video (see Figure 6 above) and how drugs function to "numb pain and

suffering" (Rose 2008: 46), Euro Crack can be seen to offer spiritual relief for existential pain with their music. An altruistic message can, however, seem contradictory to the selling of their "crack": even if the message is supposedly positive, the transaction itself is an act of mainstream market economy.

5.1.4 Otherwordly beats

RPK's role as a rap producer and beat maker is underscored simultaneously in his lyrics and visually in the video: we do not see him with a turntable, which would suggest old school hip hop, but instead with what seems to be Akai MPD32, a MIDI-over-USB performance pad controller which can be used to control software and produce for example drum sounds both in studio settings and in live performance together with a laptop. RPK's equipment signals to informed persons about his level of professionalism and commitment to a certain sound, thus authenticating his artistry and style. Rap music videos may show images of drum machines and synthesizers, turntables, stereos, computers, and other technology that is essential in the producing, releasing, playing, and promotion of rap music. Artists "showing off" technological apparatus in a music video can be interpreted to testify of a seriousness towards the sound (and importantly, samples) produced by such technology. Such apparatuses are comparable to a musical instrument, and its control and mastery are crucial to an artist's identity. The "authenticity" of the rap sound can thus be built visually as an artist engaging directly with the music controlling and production technology, showing agency through their control of the technology.[75]

RPK's verse (A', bars 65–96) starts after the second refrain (B, bars 49–64), now placing the quieter xylophone style synth riff heard in the middle of Julma Henri's verse (A, bars 33–40) into the first eight bars (65–72). It serves to calm down the mood of the song and facilitate concentrating on the lyrical message after the intense

[75] If we think of the live performances of the artists, and how the audience is able to make sense of them, Auslander (2013: 605) asserts that "audiences of music that uses relatively unfamiliar digital devices such as various MIDI interfaces or laptop computers as instruments cannot be assumed to understand the relationships between the performers' actions and the resulting sounds (unless, of course they are fully conversant with the particular technologies and techniques in use)." By this, he seems to mainly refer to the "inanimacy" of technologies such as these. However, in the case of hip hop and electronic music in general, this seems contestable considering how hip hop has been based on "inanimate" technologies, such as turntables, hence audiences are well aware of the "inanimacy" of such genres. He does note, however, how electronic musicians find other ways of highlighting their control of the music, and indeed, we often see exaggerated knob turns, or key board hits, like in RPK's case. Indeed, what Auslander (2013) seems to inadvertently reveal is how genre specific the perceived liveness of music is.

refrain with synthesizer accents "hammering" the words. The lyrics speak of the multiple work stages of being a rapper-producer:

> Adjusting raps looping rhythms
> Pumping drums finetuning tracks
>
> *Räppiä rukkaa rytmejä luuppaa*
> *Rumpuja pumppaa stygiä tuunaa*

(Kräkkäkränkkä," Euro Crack 2013c)

Not only does RPK claim to hone lyrics, he also adjusts everything else about the tracks. Note that two of the verbs refer to amending the songs, which constructs the notion that he is a perfectionist when it comes to making music, and that he uses a variety of equipment for working on loops, drums, and other parts of the beat. As d'Errico (2011: 5–6) notes, "[a hip hop] 'producer' is not just the studio engineer or manager of the recording sessions – as he or she may be in other popular music styles – but also the studio beatmaker and the 'live' DJ showcasing his or her material." Interestingly, this also ties the video and RPK's role as a producer to authenticity, and, following d'Errico (2011), to underground authenticity in particular: D'Errico (2011: 3) asserts that Akai's MPC (Music Production Controller) is "a device that has long been a secret weapon in the hip-hop producer's arsenal as well as a marker of 'underground' authenticity [...]." D'Errico uses the term underground in an aesthetic sense above all else.[76] I find it interesting that RPK is clearly portrayed as a beat maker and producer in "Kräkkäkränkkä," both in the lyrics and visually, more than as a rapper. As seen above, he mostly raps about his production (of rhymes, drums, and tracks). RPK, who is responsible for all the beats on Khid's album *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) and Euro Crack's releases, has also admitted being influenced by so-called Memphis rap sound with dark beats and slow tempo. This is perhaps more audible in his work in the Finnish rap group KC/MD Mafia which Khid is also a part of (as DJ Kridlokk). Memphis rap has also influenced horrorcore rap which is characterized by its morbidness and occasional parodying of gangsta rap; hence, I would conclude that some influences are noticeable here as well.

[76] This becomes evident in the way d'Errico uses the term in his study, and the fact is that the artists he references, Madlib, DJ Shadow, and Flying Lotus, are well-established names in the hip hop industry; their streams are counted in millions in Spotify and Youtube, thus calling them underground in terms of exposure would seem somewhat incorrect.

Figure 8. "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): RPK showcasing his AKAI controller while Julma Henri prepares to deal with the beats with a fire extinguisher (01:58).

At 01:58, Julma Henri is seen standing next to RPK with a fire extinguisher in his hands, suggesting that RPK's beats are so hot that they might burst into flames at any moment (see **Figure 8** above). Given the music-as-drug analogy, it can be surmised that RPK is cooking (Euro) crack with his equipment. During his short ca. one-minute verse (01:45–02:37), we see RPK manipulating the AKAI drum machine altogether six times. Producers showing off their gear is of course nothing new.[77] Considering Demers's (2010: 48) observation that electronically constructed sound is "otherwordly, futuristic, and even alien," the high visibility of technology in the video further underscores the otherworldly themes of the song. Additionally, there is a significant amount of added reverb which makes the beat sound spacy.[78] Rap can be seen to challenge historical notions of music due to its somewhat symbiotic relationship with technology, foregrounding the constructedness of sound through the use of samplers and controllers. Naturally, the techniques of music making have evolved tremendously within the past half a century which has affected the discourse of authenticity, too (see Katz 2004). Simon Frith (2004) among others has noted that technology has transformed from something questioning the authenticity of a piece

77 See for example Madlib on the back cover of *Madvillainy* (Madvillain 2004) album with "classic" E-Mu systems SP 1200 drum machine.

78 Futurism and "otherwordly" effects were incorporated into science fiction movies in the 1960s and later came to be recognized more or less as "spacy." Examples of such sounds include computer-generated and synthesizer sounds but also effects that are added, such as echo, which creates a sensation of spaciousness.

of music into supporting it. Similarly here, this foregrounding of technology serves to display as well as authenticate RPK's role as a producer.

RPK's rapping is multifaceted, making use of percussive and speech effusive styles (see Krims 2000) and trioles, and his delivery frequently plays with on- and off-beat accents and changes in tempo, stretching syllables and breaking any clear lines of phrases, yet he places accents mostly on the rhyming syllables (such as hyvää-pyhää-yhä; see Appendix 1). RPK's lavish use of off-beat delivery also contributes to the feeling that we are now even more under the influence of some substance or in another world, everything appearing irregular both visually and sonically. RPK has boasted on several Euro Crack songs ("Douppiidouppaa," "Pojat on huudeilla," Euro Crack 2013a) about his rapping and producing skills. His boasting, unlike that of commercially successful mainstream rappers, is not about records sales but about the quality of music. In his verse (see below and Appendix 1), he asserts that "sucker dudes" need to be shut down, as their music is wack and Euro Crack's music is good – "it's just bad and this is good" ("se on vaan huonoo ja tää vaan hyvää"), simultaneously showing two middle fingers slightly towards the ground twice as though those rappers were below him both physically and quality-wise. While placing his hands on his mouth in the video (at 02:21), RPK also compares their music to a leakage that needs to be clogged fast as it might cause harm:

When I drop it it's like a fjord
When a sucker dude opens his mouth it's like a leak
That needs to be clogged fast it doesn't work no way
It's just bad
And this is good
For me sacred
It shows as I like this still

Kun mä tiputan sen se on ku vuono
Kun sucker jäbä avaa kuonon se on kuin vuoto
Joka pitää tukkia äkkiä ei se toimi millään muotoo
Se on vaan huonoo
Ja tää vaan hyvää
Mulle pyhää
Se näkyy kun tästä tykkään yhä

("Kräkkäkränkkä," Euro Crack 2013c)

RPK also tells us that to him, music making is like a "fjord" ("vuono") and "sacred" ("pyhää"), setting his productions apart from commercially oriented music with its assumed focus on making money. On the one hand, RPK seemingly describes his music as something naturally occurring and massive like a fjord (a bay formed by glacial erosion). This word choice arguably constructs his local identity as hailing from North Europe as fjords are somewhat common here (albeit more so in Norway where the English translation also comes from) and characterizes his music as greater than any average producer's or rapper's. On the other hand, the word "sacred" also attaches his music making to religiosity, as he appears to compare it to a holy ritual or religious practice, something connecting him with a higher entity, and with more meaning than mundane activities. It also insinuates that he transmits spiritual ideas through his music and that music making is part of his religious identity as he "still" likes it. RPK finishes his verse by asserting that "those who don't get it may get left behind" ("ne jotka ei hiffaa voi jäädä syrjään"), suggesting that those who do not get the (spiritual) message of Euro Crack's music also cannot keep up with them.

5.1.5 Cracking the message

At the end of the song while the instrumental outro plays (03:04–03:17), we see the floor behind the rappers beginning to collapse as black smoke rises from underneath it. This visually highlights the surrealism of the video. The transition is also marked by a dust cloud which transforms the color-world of the video from violet to blue and then back, then finally to an intense mixture of violet and pink (see **Figure 9** below). The end of the video features an excerpt of the track "Mustavalo" ("Black light") from the same *Huume* album (Euro Crack 2013a). During this finale, Julma Henri and RPK are portrayed as ghostly, shining creatures. The effect is reminiscent of a negative image where the light and colors are reversed, creating a contrast between the "actual" music video for "Kräkkäkränkkä" and its tail end. It can be interpreted to symbolize a spiritual transformation, a transition into an alternative yet parallel world. During this part, the words "musta aukko" ("black hole") and "musta valo" ("black light," or "light from me," as Julma Henri pointed out [Euro Crack i2015]) are repeated. Indeed, RPK hints at this ending already in his verse (at 02:34) when he raps that "a super massive black hole runs through my head" ("supermassiivinen musta aukko mun päässä jyllää").

These lyrics about reaching "the black hole" point towards an inescapable nothingness and infinity, or a singularity; they could be interpreted to symbolize the (Buddhist) fundamental ephemerality of all reality, and the (Buddhist) idea of our seemingly individual consciousness being part of the non-dual omnipresent consciousness in the world. In Buddhism, this realization of fundamental emptiness and impermanence is believed to lead to a liberated, enlightened state. Like from the

edge of a black hole, once you reach a state of enlightenment, there is no return (to ignorance). At 03:44 in the song, Julma Henri utters the last words, "musta valo" ("black light") which continue to echo as the video image transitions to slow motion. The multiple visual cues as well as changing the song suggest that we have travelled to another dimension or reality together with the rappers, which is still somehow parallel to our everyday world.

Figure 9. "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): The ghostly rappers in the pink "Mustavalo" finale after the spiritual transformation (03:41).

As stated, the refrain invites us to "crack" the song ("kräkkää tää") and "crank it up" ("kränkkää tää"), in other words to make sense of the song's message and to turn it up. In fact, the answer to the first demand is also offered in the refrain:

> When Euro Crack is here it's not enough that you're here
> You have to understand you have to be present
>
> *Kun Euro Crack on täällä ei riitä et oot tässä*
> *Sun pitää kässää sun pitää olla läsnä*
>
> ("Kräkkäkränkkä," Euro Crack 2013c)

Like in Ameeba's "Vanhasielu" (see subchapter 5.2 below), also in "Kräkkäkränkkä" the central message appears to be becoming and staying present in the present moment. The "Kräkkäkränkkä" song relies on rhythmic repetition of the two

words of the refrain, “kräkkää” and “kränkkää”; repetition of certain syllables is also highly common in meditation. Soundwise, the difference between Euro Crack and Ameeba is more remarkable; the echoing, meditative world of Ameeba stands in contrast to Euro Crack’s dark, even terrifying world with seemingly supernatural forces taking over our minds through the “drug,” the music with ultra-fast hi-hats and synthesizers. Interpreted from the point of view of immediatist new spirituality (Versluis 2014), this request (or command) to “be present” suggests that in order to receive spiritual insight or a connection with a higher being or a transcendent state, it is necessary to be fully present in the here-and-now; enlightenment is possible by paying close attention to Euro Crack’s music in the present moment. For example in spiritual teachings of previously mentioned Eckhart Tolle, developing “presence” and “awareness” is key for developing spiritual consciousness (Versluis 2014: 180; Tolle 2005). Developing presence is also the essence of mindfulness practices which have recently become mainstream in Western societies and are used now also in education and work life for improving concentration and performance.

The song can be interpreted also as a criticism of mainstream rap music and mainstream society. Given that the use of drugs is generally illegal as well as non-normative (despite a growing international acceptance to legalize cannabis and consequent passing of new legislations in some states), the transgression implied by the highly addictive crack cocaine in the name and music of Euro Crack also highlights the fact that their music is not suitable for mainstream, but represents alternative underground culture. Additionally, RPK is seen showing two middle fingers twice during his verse where he criticizes other rappers and their music; in our interview, he explained that he wanted to make the style of Euro Crack very “rap” and “in your face” (see 4.3 above), which then has translated into somewhat aggressive aesthetics. Yet the undertone, as RPK explained, has always been about deeper philosophical ideas (Euro Crack i2015).

To conclude, the video and song can be seen to construct the spiritual message and underground rap image of Euro Crack with the help of audiovisual cues familiar from hip hop culture and drug discourse; the video becomes a restaging of urban ghetto authenticity while the drug discourse, which would not have been available without the visual cues, is exploited to deliver a message of an altered, spiritual consciousness. In this way, the video also builds a certain distance to what is often considered as commercial rap and its standard images of partying, scantily clad women, etc.

This subchapter has presented just one possible reading. It becomes evident that signifying in hip hop is much more complex and discursively creative than simply words can imply. It seems imperative to include the audiovisual expressions into the analysis of discourses in order to more fully understand their nature and significance, thus extending the scope of discourse analysis from language to a more holistic view

of discourse in the study of popular music and further, understanding how audiovisuality contributes to the discourses around spirituality.

5.2 "Vanhasielu": spiritual journey in Nordic nature

This second subchapter provides a close reading of the music video "Vanhasielu" ("Old Soul," Ameeba 2014b) by Ameeba. The video focuses closely on Ameeba in wintery Finnish Lapland or Sápmi (Sami land), surrounded by snow and sled dogs, while audiovisually constructing a discourse around spirituality and nature, particularly through cultural notions about transmigration of souls and the North. These central features and ideas of the video are analyzed with the help of three pairs of juxtaposed concepts: landscapes/soundscapes (section 5.2.2), ageing/timelessness (section 5.2.3), and local/universal (section 5.2.4). Sonically, the song draws particularly from ambient music and dub techno. The structure of the "Vanhasielu" song more or less follows a verse-refrain form, consisting of intro AB interlude A'BB outro. The first verse (A, bars 33–64) consists of 32 bars, whereas the second verse (A', bars 97–136) extends to 40 bars. The refrain (B) contains 16 bars. The instrumental intro and outro are very long, 32 and 40 bars respectively, and the instrumental interlude is 16 bars. Song key is A minor and tempo 135 bpm. The song and beat was produced by Lobo (Visa Mäkinen), and the lyrics were written by Ameeba. (See Appendix 2 for details.)

The video was released in February 2014, and has since gained critical acclaim for example at the national Oulu Music Video festival by receiving an honorary mention that same year. The total length of the video is six minutes eight seconds (06:08). The video was filmed by Jukka Metsäaho in January 2013 in the large municipality of Inari, which is located north of the Arctic circle in the North Calotte region (the northern most part of Fennoscandia). One third of the Inari population is Sámi, and three Sámi languages are also in official use in the area. With its vast nature areas, fjelds, and lakes, Inari is a popular destination among tourists, but the area and its indigenous population and cultural heritage are also very vulnerable. Filming "Vanhasielu" video in the Inari wilderness in the winter was extremely challenging, as the temperature was around -25 degrees Celsius, the windy weather adding to the freezing cold. Additionally, the sun barely rose above the horizon at all, hence it was necessary to take advantage of the few moments of daylight available to be able to film, and the filming took several days (Ameeba i2015b).

In this subchapter, I analyze how a discourse of the North and the idea of transmigration construct the authenticity of Ameeba's artist persona and spirituality drawing from Eastern religions. I first introduce the main concepts, North and transmigration, after which I proceed to analyze the music video.

5.2.1 The discursive North and transmigration

One of the most prominent features of the "Vanhasielu" ("Old Soul," Ameeba 2014b) video is the wintery Northern wilderness where Ameeba is seen outdoors with sled dogs and reindeers. In her book *Canada and the Idea of North*, scholar of literature and art Sherrill E. Grace (2002: 125) lists qualities that are frequently associated with the cultural discourse of "Northern," such as space, silence, austerity, extreme cold, isolation, snow, and ice. Winter thus seems to be one of the central elements attached to the North, in addition to being positioned in the margins, outside the societal and cultural "center" (Ridanpää 2016; Torvinen forthcoming 2020). The North is also typically seen as an "uncontamined" and "pure" space which "human civilization" has not yet corrupted nor polluted. Grace (2002: 137), drawing from composer and music educator R. Murray Schafer, further states that "[…] we are as constructed by our geography and soundscape as is any imagined community or national identity that we might construct from the physical and social elements[…]." Grace (2002: 16–17) notes that the North is often depicted as something that a wanderer, often gendered male,[79] can explore and conquer or "die nobly" in trying. These depictions illustrate the discursive character of the North which is often defined in opposition to the South (Grace 2002; see also Ridanpää 2016). The stereotypical South can be construed as the opposite of the exotic North, as the modern, civilized, urban cultural center; note however that the global North is depicted as the wealthy and modernized counterpart of the stereotype of global rural South. Thus the context also matters in how stereotypes are constructed. (Ridanpää 2016:18–20.)

The North also exists as "intricately embedded within popular culture discourses" (Riches et al. 2016: 1; see also Grace 2002; Spracklen 2016; Ridanpää 2016). An increasing number of popular music research today discusses the "Northern" (e.g. Torvinen forthcoming 2020) or "Nordic" (e.g. Holt & Kärjä eds. 2017) qualities and tropes found in popular music, including those of rap music (Ramnarine 2013; see also Leppänen & Pietikäinen 2010). Grace (2002) discusses the North in the context of Canadian popular culture, including music, paintings, fiction novels, and theatre. In novels, for example, Grace (2002: 184–185) finds repetitive descriptions of North as a space filled with emptiness, silence, and being outside of the "normal" society – read the South – but also North as the backdrop for a story about a (white) male fleeing from southern life in search of "solitude or physical or spiritual adventure […]" (see also Ridanpää 2016: 18–19). The ruthless

[79] This gendering relates to the cultural associations of male-civilization vs. female-nature, see for example Grace (2002). See also Milestone (2016) on the hegemonic masculinity of Northenness.

unpredictability of the Northern nature is a recurring trope in the material Grace (2002) has studied. Grace's (2002) observations about the several aspects frequently attached to the discursive idea of the North share similarities with findings in other cultural studies (cf. e.g. Riches et al. 2016; Ridanpää 2016). Finland is also generally considered to be a land of dark, long winters in the popular imagination. The stereotypes regarding the northern parts of Finland and Lapland/Sápmi in particular (where also "Vanhasielu" was filmed) fit the stereotype of the exotic North, complete with reindeers and beautiful nature (see Ridanpää 2016; see Pulkkinen 1999: 135; cf. Grace 2002: 169). Further, environmentalism is a common theme in music that somehow reflects the North (Dibben 2017; Torvinen forthcoming 2020; Torvinen & Välimäki 2019; Välimäki 2019), and it is also a theme present in much of Ameeba's work.

The idea of North as "God's country" with "spiritual power," as friendly lands and resources to be exploited, "sublime beauty" (Grace 2002: 11, 17; cf. Dibben 2017), as well as the popular image of north as "God-forsaken wilderness," are all valid interpretations of the representations that the music video for Ameeba's song "Vanhasielu" offers, demonstrating the constructive force of geography, cultural imagery, and soundscape. Nature is clearly a key protagonist in the "Vanhasielu" video, and so is the white male escaping the south to find peace and serenity. Although spiritual ideas also feature in the music of other Finnish underground rappers, as seen in this study for example, Ameeba to some extent stands out from the other rappers in this study with his ecocritical lyrics and ideas connected to folk traditions where respect for nature and its cycle of life is paramount. An ongoing co-operation with the Sámi rapper Áilu Valle, who has included similar themes in his music, can also be seen to bring an aspect of credibility to Ameeba's endeavors to connect Northern nature with his music. While ecocritical, philosophical lyrics, and more ambient sounds are not exclusively Ameeba's trademark in Finnish rap (see Välimäki 2019), they also do not manifest solely in any specific region in Finland.

Ameeba asserts that his (spiritual) connection with nature is first and foremost experiential (Ameeba i2015a; Ameeba i2017). This experience-oriented approach is also visible in his music, as he tends to rap about situations and emotions he has (supposedly) felt first-hand and those experiences have moved him in one way or another. Similarly, he is the only human protagonist in the "Vanhasielu" video. Ameeba also describes bodily affects somewhat frequently in his lyrics[80]; occasionally, these affects also find sonic forms in his music, including for example humming, and/or harmonies that closely resemble the kind of bodily resonance utilized in meditation or yoga for instance to help center attention.

[80] Listen, for example, to lyrics in the song "Illo" (Ameeba 2012b) which focus on spiritual and bodily experiences during and after sauna on a winter night.

The other prominent theme or concept that arises in "Vanhasielu" from the very first lines when Ameeba raps "I'm a bearded old soul I've lived this time for long" ("oon parrakas vanhasielu eläny aikaa kauan") is transmigration or reincarnation[81]. In some modern forms of spirituality which draw from Hinduism and Buddhism, those in the final stages of reincarnation and spiritual development are considered "old souls." Reincarnation, transmigration, or the rebirth of the soul, is not only a commonly held belief in Eastern religions and occurring in other religions, but it is also an idea familiar to people around the world and indeed, quite commonly held also in the West (Katz 1996; Partridge 2004: 51), which can be considered one result of "Easternization" (Campbell 2007: 72–74). It is also a subject which has been afforded empirical interest by scholars who have sought evidence that would help understand the widely spread idea of past lives (Playfair 2006). Adjectives such as "mature," "serene," and "calm" are some of the suggested traits of "old souls" (Playfair 2006: 126) that are thought to have reincarnated and thus traveled for a longer period of time than most other souls. Spiritual evolutionism is a general trait of New Age discourse, referring to a belief in the perpetual spiritual progress of the universe and hence also among humans (Versluis 2014: 162). Hanegraaff (1996: 263) states that reincarnation according to a New Age framework is a "learning task, which serves the cosmic process of progressive spiritual education and evolution of consciousness." A similar spiritual process appears to be narrated in Ameeba's music more generally, as was discussed in section 4.1.1.

In the following sections, I analyze the "Vanhasielu" music video through the ideas of transmigration and the North, with the help of three pairs of juxtaposed concepts: landscapes/soundscapes (5.2.2), ageing/timelessness (5.2.3), and local/universal (5.2.4). My analysis aims to account for the ways with which the video constructs a spiritual worldview through various lyrical, sonic, and visual cues, and how the video projects a discursive authenticity regarding its protagonist(s) through immediacy and (sur)realistic camera work.

5.2.2 Landscapes/soundscapes

The "Vanhasielu" music video (Ameeba 2014b) begins with a blurred slow motion of the rapper at a camp fire, and a dog is soon brought into focus. This opening sequence is followed by a short time lapse of trees shaking in the wind. The short time lapse changes into real time footage of trees in the wind (at 00:19), which suggests that one key theme of the video is time, and the elusiveness and subjectivity of time. It takes a full minute before we actually see the rapper's face clearly; nature and animals are thus

[81] Beck (1996: 88, 101) asserts that at least for discussing the Hindu perspective, transmigration is a better term than reincarnation for etymological reasons.

literally put first in the video. This first minute of the song, the introduction, is dominated by ambient synthesizers, the concrete crackling sound of the campfire, and shadowy winter landscapes with reindeers and dogs – even the bass drum only enters the song at 00:29. The rather legato layered synthesizers, the most prominent musical element of the song and the sound of which alternates between keyboards, woodwind instrument, and an electric guitar, is untypical for the rap genre where strong beats, drum breaks and ruptures are usually central (see Rose 1994: 39; Williams 2014: 2). Thus centering the meditative, static drone-like sound can be seen to break genre conventions. Indeed, "Vanhasielu" contains many characteristics of ambient or minimalist music. Musicologists Juha Torvinen and Susanna Välimäki (2019) assert that drones and other static or repetitive elements as well as textures relying on silencing or sound masses are key elements in Nordic music that reflects natural surroundings: these elements request the listener to focus on their listening experience and remain present in the moment much like in meditation.

Once the first verse and rapping starts, we finally see a sharp close up of Ameeba (see Figure 12 further below), which suggests that the animals and nature are, after all, a backdrop to the story of the rapper. A man at a camp fire below a fjeld is a cliché in narrations about Lapland/Sápmi but it also underscores the smallness of humans in the face of nature and the "great mysteries of life" (Lehtola 2007: 359). The camp fire images are accompanied by sound effects reminiscent of cracking wood, perhaps recorded separately during the video shoot or synthesized sound made to reminisce natural sound. The seemingly part-organic, part-artificial soundscape mixes with natural landscapes throughout the song. I use the term soundscape to refer to the totality of the various layered sounds in the video (cf. van Leeuwen 1999: 15–19). The (supposedly) natural sounds in the video are all diegetic, the dog barking, the wind howling and the firewood cracking, thus functioning as manifestations of the rapper's physical environment (van Leeuwen 1999: 23) which support the narration. The dog barking sounds are not present in the album version of the song (Ameeba 2015c).

The "Vanhasielu" video, as so many portrayals before it, also constructs a discourse of North as a kind of wonderland, pure, natural, and spiritually uplifting. Geographer and hip hop scholar Mervi Tervo (2012), who has analyzed Finnish rap music videos in terms of space and place, notes following Carol Vernallis that in rap music videos in particular, there is a tendency to highlight spatial details, particularly urban social spaces. In this sense, "Vanhasielu" and its nature imagery is simultaneously an exception and a commonality among rap videos. Following Vernallis's insight (2004: 45) about "how a song might sound in the actual space of the music video," it is possible to notice through close analysis that although the sounds heard closely resemble the video's narration in "Vanhasielu," and the video has real barking samples for example, most of the sounds are synthesized and thus

seem to form a juxtaposition of technology vs. nature considering the nature setting the video is placed in. However, as Nicola Dibben (2017: 174) points out, in some cases popular music can portray the opposite: "technological innovation is not just compatible with nature but is also a way we can access the beyond-human world, thereby bringing humans to a more productive relationship with it." Similarly, Ameeba provides access to nature and a spiritual world through his music and video.

A crucial effect of the (natural) landscape to the (synthesized) soundscape is that the whole video has been shot outdoors, hence the highly echoed sounds are also eerie and "wide-open," free to float into air and space. The echoed beats in "Vanhasielu" thus connect with the vast landscapes, shot in wide-angle longshots, and create a larger-than-life impression of the whole, suggesting a supernatural or spiritual world beyond the video, a world separate from the viewer's everyday life (van Leeuwen 1999: 13; cf. analysis of "Kräkkäkränkkä" above in 5.1). This serves as a contrast to, for example, Euro Crack's "Kräkkäkränkkä" (2013) analyzed in subchapter 5.1, which was shot in an industrial factory building made of concrete; hence the sounds also seem more metallic and hard.

Considering how the camera portrays the rapper, the otherworldly effect is most pronounced at the end of the first verse when the rapper and the background appear unrealistically white and the camera is positioned well-below Ameeba in a way that he becomes reminiscent of a hovering ghost or spirit at 01:53 (see **Figure 10** below). Interestingly, although Ameeba appears rather like some kind of a ghostly apparition, he utters the word "eloa," life, at the same moment, suggesting he is very much alive.

Figure 10. "Vanhasielu" (Ameeba 2014b): Hovering Ameeba in the surreally white winter forest (01:55).

The Finnish Lapland/Sápmi in general has been depicted in quite similar terms in Finnish popular music as in the imagery of the "Vanhasielu" video. The male goes out into the arctic, leaving behind human relationships and other "southern" worries and restlessness, forging instead a connection with nature that can comfort him. The essential is to merge with the nature's massiveness, solitude, and the vast open space of the northern sky and lands. This area in the north of Finland thus represents a place of rest, physically, mentally, and spiritually, but also of survival (Lehtola 2007: 10–14).

The nature depicted in the "Vanhasielu" video is somewhat surreal in its beauty – and not unlike the winter sceneries we see in another Ameeba music video, "Illo" (Ameeba 2012b), which was filmed in the south of Finland in his town of origin, Vammala.[82] It is likely not a coincidence that both videos were shot during winter time but rather an aesthetic that the artist is drawn to and connects with the lyrical and musical meanings of his music. I asked about the choice of location for "Vanhasielu" and Ameeba could not explain the choice, "it just somehow felt like it would fit the song" ("se nyt vaan jotenki tuntu et se sopis siihe biisiin," Ameeba i2015b). This suggests that Ameeba is aware of the kind of popular cultural imagery attached to the North discussed above, thus his spiritual ideas, for example, can be accentuated through the kind of visual depiction seen in "Vanhasielu." The North has often also held a significant role in the construction of critical commentary on environmental issues also in popular music (Torvinen forthcoming 2020); Ameeba's style of spiritual eco rap with its occasionally apocalyptic visions (see subchapter 4.1) seems to be no exception to this.

An extensive, ambient song intro such as the 56-second one in "Vanhasielu" resists mainstream tastes and format radio's preference for neatly packaged commercial hits with catchy melodies and quick transitions within the song, as do the long instrumental interlude (28 seconds) and outro (1 min 10 seconds). Torvinen (forthcoming 2020) notes that in North-related music, the extensive usage of time and space can be interpreted to underscore the extensive seasons with and without light (midsummer and midwinter respectively) as well as the peculiarities of Northern cold climate and vast wilderness. The extensive length of the song and video – over six minutes – along with the diegetic sound effects (dogs, firewood, wind) render the video rather like a short film than just music industry's promotional

[82] In "Illo," we not only see Ameeba with a dog but also a river in the middle of the snow-covered forest which can be interpreted as reflecting spirituality and time if we think of Grace's (2002: 218) characterization of rivers as having "religious associations" and functioning as "metaphors for time itself, for life and death, and for purification and rebirth." Similar themes have manifested in Ameeba's lyrics. "Illo" (Ameeba 2012b) is also one of the most melodic songs by Ameeba and thus also "kin" to "Vanhasielu" (Ameeba 2015b).

standard. Together these features enhance the notion that we are dealing with audiovisual art rather than a commodity meant to endorse the music product. Vernallis (2013) points out that defining what is a music video in today's world is far from simple, and this video seems a case in point. These short film style of narrative aesthetics also underscore that the video aims to tell a story instead of merely showcasing and selling the rapper's music.

Shooting the video was particularly challenging due to lack of light during that time of year when the sun barely rises at all in the North. Yet, the camera work is extremely realistic, detailing every bit of light, horizon, and the protagonists, the rapper and the animals, in high definition. The rapper and the animals are filmed almost solely with close-ups, whereas the landscapes, the vast wilderness, are filmed with longshots. Close-ups construct meanings as more real, more personal and allow for a more intimate relationship between the viewer and the artist, as the facial expressions become more readily available (Marshall 2001:13). Hence, we can expect already from the first shots of the video that the lyrics will be personal and about the rapper's own experiences. As Vernallis (2004: 55) notes, foregrounding through a close-up serves to underline something, and in the case of "Vanhasielu," it is mainly the lyrics (and rhythmic delivery) of the rapper being emphasized along with the connection with animals. Also, following Richardson's (2012: 68) argument about the meaning of filming speed alteration, I argue that the shifting between slow motion and normal speed throughout the video constructs the video as part of the subjective lifeworld of the rapper. The infinite landscapes in turn appear to connote a spiritual world, rendering the song's message larger than life.

The idea of pure, unpolluted and surreally beautiful nature is highlighted not only by the white snow, but also for example in a close up of the clear-blue eyes of a dog (see **Figure 11** below). The images we see throughout the video are in fact in no way surprising or conflictual with the way Lapland/Sápmi is generally portrayed visually. Snow, vastness, trees and forests, animals, and the evident lack of human imprint are all essential to that imagery, and to the way (northern) nature's spiritual qualities are often evoked (see Anttonen 1994: 29–30). Sled dogs are very prominently featured in the video, and upon our interview, Ameeba said that the idea of dogs was perhaps a result of his feeling that they belong to that "Lapland scenery" (Ameeba i2015b). It is possible to argue that visually, the video offers a rather "touristic" vision of Lapland/Sápmi (cf. also Ridanpää 2016: 17–19), yet the fact that the dog farm belongs to a friend of the rapper (Ameeba i2015b) suggests that personal reasons were also involved in including them in the video.

Figure 11. "Vanhasielu" (Ameeba 2014b): Blue dog eyes evoking pure nature (00:45).

Besides close-ups and the fact that the rapper is the only human in the video, the lyrics use first person singular to a large extent, and thus the actions, both lyrically and visually, are attributed to the rapper. The fact that he is the author of the song and the sole human character in the video establishes a strong agency and constructs an aura of authenticity. The viewer is lead to believe that the story in the music is written by Ameeba about himself, thus the song seems to represent a kind of "inner world" authenticity (Weisethaunet & Lindberg 2010: 471). As noted before, rapping about personal experiences is the quintessential criterion for personal-experiential hip hop authenticity. This contributes to the hip hop standard of authenticity as being about lived experience in music (McLeod 1999; Forman 2002; Keyes 2002; Rose 2008; Speers 2014).

The vocal delivery is intimate, further constructing the rapper's authenticity[83], as the somewhat soft grain of voice and often audible breathing suggest a physical closeness to the microphone. This effect is further exacerbated by the vocals featuring a reverb effect which suggests space, as do the echoed beats; they construct a sense of immersive diegesis, as though we were outdoors listening right next to the rapper in the music video. Although the echoes blur the musical elements quite a bit, the looped beat unfolds as containing many layers: a swaying synthesizer laying the

[83] Musicologist Nicola Dibben (2009: 319) argues that highlighting voice in song mixing draws attention to the artist, which together with "a compositional ideology in which singers understand themselves to be expressing things about or from their own experience" constructs authenticity, for engineers and audience members alike.

overall mood and base for the song, a bass drum which is reinforced with a snare beat, and cut partially during verses and refrain with a double-time off-beat crash effect. The crash beat is utilized much more from the first refrain onwards, becoming nearly prominent in the second verse and hence allowing the song intensity to grow. The song is unusually melodic for a rap song, and indeed the only "textbook" feature of rap (apart from rapped vocals) is the bass drum beat which is also sacrificed at many points for the swaying synthesizers. Utilizing social semiotics scholar Theo van Leeuwen's (1999) terms, the rapping and the synthesizers act as "Figure" in the hierarchy of sounds in the song, as they are foregrounded and become the most prominent elements. The barking of dogs creates a whole rhytmic texture of its own, the main function of which seems to be to disrupt the crucial role of technology that has been put to use to create the song in the first place. Also a short tinkling melody reminiscent of a xylophone appears at a various points during and between verses (see Appendix 2), adding a fairytale like effect to the surreal imagery of the video.

Flow-wise, Ameeba alternates mainly between speech-effusive and percussion-effusive delivery (Krims 2000), which makes the song rhythmically versatile, for example through the use of several trioles and occasional chopper-style, the ultra-fast "machine-gun" delivery which Ameeba is known for. The overall atmosphere remains more or less the same throughout the song, the refrain adding only slight volume and texture with voice-doubling and hi-hats that are rhythmically reminiscent of galloping, accentuating the running of dogs taking the sled with them during the last refrain in the video. The most pronounced aspect of the beat, the swaying reverb effect of the synthesizer, could be seen to suggest wind or perhaps the flow of life, but its drone-like quality also evokes circular time, or rather in this case, timelessness.

5.2.3 Ageing/timelessness

The first verse (A) begins with an audiovisual blending of wind footage, a sound effect reminiscent of wind howling, and the rapper's own voice, a kind of sigh blowing air out of his lungs. These together lead us to the first lines, thus it seems as though the rapper's voice becomes one with the wind. The wind sound acts as a drone, which according to van Leeuwen (1999: 52) is "an apt signifier for the concept of 'eternity': (1) it is a continuous, never-ending, never-changing sound, and (2) it is a sound which cannot be produced by the human voice without special techniques […]." Van Leeuwen (1999: 52–54) adds that drones and other continuous or slightly fluctuating sounds typically used together with electronic instruments are able to connote non-human or supernatural meanings regarding for example nature or universe, and the soundscape is reminiscent of drone music in that it seems to be

"traveling through a large space before dissipating several moments later" (Demers 2010: 97; cf. Torvinen & Välimäki 2019).

Considering the music and rap delivery in "Vanhasielu," Ameeba begins nearly all of his verses off-beat, further deconstructing a sense of clear linearity. Also, this song – like many of Ameeba's – features dub techno and ambient influences where part of the genres' properties is to confuse the sense of time passing and put more focus on the present by using static and repetitive sonic elements (see Torvinen & Välimäki 2019). Ambient could also be characterized as a genre that demands rethinking our relationship with music and space through focused listening, even aiming at a loss of self (Till 2017: 336). More generally, minimalist music as well as electronic music genres often uses repetition, stasis, and other musical elements which confuse our sense of time, furthering immersion (Gann & Potter & ap Siôn 2013: 4–8; Demers 2010; Torvinen & Välimäki 2019). While "Vanhasielu" can be seen to follow the verse-refrain form, the extended instrumental parts in the beginning, middle, and end along with the additional bars in the second verse distinguish the structure of the song from standard popular music pieces, and further contribute to the minimalist aesthetic and sense of timelessness in the song.

Figure 12. "Vanhasielu" (Ameeba 2014b): Close up of Ameeba's wrinkles and winter frost evoking ageing and surrendering to nature (00:59).

The first sharp image we see of Ameeba in the video (at 00:59, see **Figure 12** above) is a close-up of his face which highlights his wrinkles and the frost on his face which indicates that he is outside in the cold. The first lines, "I'm a bearded old soul I've lived this time for long" ("oon parrakas vanha sielu eläny aikaa kauan"), are uttered

during the extreme close-up, thus ageing is highlighted as one of the song's key themes, but also the idea of transmigration is immediate through the lyrics (see Appendix 2). In the Finnish language, there is a clear difference between "aik*a* kauan" (rather long) and "aik*aa* kauan" (the/this time for long); this one letter difference (an additional 'a') indicates that the rapper talks about the time he has lived, which stretches long, instead of some more indeterminate period of time. The point of zooming into his beard and wrinkles is seemingly to enforce this idea: the rapper is portrayed as a sage from the very beginning, whose life experience and the long journey his soul has purportedly traveled affords him with the kind of wisdom not available for ordinary people. In popular imagery, sages are old men with beards. Ameeba recites his life experiences in the lyrics using such expressions as "[I've] known," "I have what to write about" and particularly repeating the word "experiences," thus perhaps trying to convince the listener that he possesses knowledge about what life is all about and that he is worth listening to. This image of him is further exacerbated by the stress placed on the final words of each line, as is typical of rap delivery more generally. Ameeba often shares advice and guidelines in his other songs while addressing the listener in second person singular, purportedly drawing from his own past mistakes and learning experiences.

In the "Vanhasielu" video, the discourse of the North is being utilized to the maximum; the wind howling, although only an effect perhaps of the programmed wind instruments (flute?) but which are easily associated with northenness (cf. Grace 2002: 133), renders the images cold, or rather freezing, not to mention the frostbit face of the rapper which makes it evident that we are witnessing temperatures well below zero. In addition to an aging/ageless sage, the rapper is depicted as a lone ranger trying to survive in the midst of cold winter and animals (reindeers, sled dogs) in the North. The video can be seen to create a sonic image of what the North sounds like, despite the fact that the song was written and produced in the South of Finland (Ameeba i2015b). Yet, from another point of view, all Finns are of the North and anything and arguably everything here bears the mark of this and related discourses.

The second verse of the song ends with Ameeba lip-synching to the camera "[this old soul] will endure because it can handle the occasional chafe" ("vanha sielu jaksaa koska sietää et joskus hiertää"); the rapper seems to tell us he will endure the harsh conditions he is in. The video's portrayal of the extreme climate which, however, is typical of such northern latitudes during winter time underscores the rapper's mental struggles amidst life's challenges. Not only the depiction of roughness and toughness required for survival in the North but additionally the repetitive zooming into the rapper's beard, and, one might argue, also the crooning style of his delivery (cf. Richardson 2012: 266) together construct romantic notions of masculinity. It can also be seen to construct the idea of tough Finns who have endured all kinds of troubles and wars in the past.

What we see and hear quite immediately in "Vanhasielu" is that stereotypes of rap music as violent, sexist, or bling-oriented do not apply to this song or artist. Nor does the video or music seem to have anything to do with rap's authenticity clichés such as urban street credibility, gangsta masculinity, or "hustling" with drugs and guns. Rather, the rapper speaks of the essence of his life as being satisfied with the little things, and not worrying about the insignificant aspects. This manifests in several ways in the lyrics. What may be an oasis for a quick pit-stop to the listener is Ameeba's camping ground to dwell in and enjoy ("sun keidas on mun camping"), and our infuriating traffic jams are just about as meaningful and painful to him as a suddenly grown out stubble ("sun ruuhka on mun sänki"). Both mental images highlight an idea of the subjectivity of our experiences regarding time and emotions, and the rapper thus calls his ponderings relativity theory ("suhteellisuusteoriaa"). This also underscores how mundane things are, in the end, insignificant for the bigger picture.

The theme of ageing is reinvoked at the end of the first verse when the rapper calls himself "a snail" and "a relic from a time when the sun guided life" ("muinaisjäänne sieltä mis aurinko ohjas eloa"). Both are nature references, and suggest that compliance with nature is his way of life, and has been the way of life in another time. This reference to an ancient society governed by nature's cycles suggests that the protagonist of the song does not feel he belongs to this day and age. This also seems to indicate that he was perhaps born during another time, now referencing his past experiences (and perhaps reincarnations).

As stated, the "Vanhasielu" lyrics narrate a story of an old soul, constructing ideas about timelessness and transmigration of the soul. The lyrics suggest that the rapper feels somewhat out of place in today's world, as his experiences and behavior do not "fit" the standards of modern life. Although he is portrayed as a wise man, the rapper also narrates that he hasn't achieved his knowledge easily, but admits having taken wrong turns, perhaps poor life choices. This can be seen in his lyrics "avoid my footprints if you're not prepared to wander about" ("vältä mun jalanjälkii jos et oo valmis harhaileen"). Indeed, he denies having wisdom although considering himself as "aware" of things ("aware of much, though not wise yet"). In the context of the transmigration theme, the line "I'll know once I'm there" ("tiedän sitten kun oon siellä") can be interpreted to imply spiritual knowledge or enlightenment achieved simultaneously with the end of karmic rebirth, the end of the soul's travels. This idea of enlightenment in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions and other modern forms of religiosity drawing from them also entails merging with the one, universal consciousness – or what is typically referred to as god in many other religions. Hanegraaff (1996: 211) notes that in New Age, "[spiritual development] means getting in touch with, and aligning oneself with one's Higher Self rather than with one's limited personality." Hanegraaff (1996: 269) also mentions that time is not an

issue in New Age thought about reincarnation; the Higher Self is not bound by (linear) time and space, but "exists in 'the spacious present.'" The circularity and repetitiveness in the music of the "Vanhasielu" song further supports this cyclical understanding of the universe.

The idea of being reborn is centuries – or rather millenia – old, dating back to (at least) early history of Hinduism and Buddhism. In Hinduism, it is believed that there is an immortal soul or *Atman*, and that at least a certain part of that soul travels onwards and is reborn into another physical entity (Beck 1996). Buddhist scholar P.D. Premasiri (1996: 145) claims that, despite the doctrine of no-self, Buddhist traditions perpetuate the idea of rebirth as being a part of *samsara*, life cycle, and highlight the necessity of transmigration for spiritual evolution. A release from this cycle is believed to be achieved through enlightenment. Premasiri (1996) explains that despite the Buddhist denial of any permanent existence and individual soul, there is a complicated idea of continuity which is causal and connected to karmic laws of life, hence allowing the seemingly contradictory ideas of rebirth and identity to manifest in Buddhism.[84]

Hanegraaff (1996: 214) notes this same paradox in New Age thinking about spiritual evolution on the one hand and inherent oneness with a higher consciousness on the other, in other words that our so-called Higher Self, often referred to as the soul (Hanegraaff 1996: 210), is already part of God/consciousness, yet we are also in an incarnational evolutionary system. This is due to a belief that "our everyday personality is […] a dream or illusion created by the real Self" and we live "in separation from our real being […] [T]he only real agent is the Higher Self expressing itself through our limited minds […]" (Hanegraaff 1996: 212). Spiritual development thus entails connecting with that higher self and through it, with God, spirit, or consciousness (Hanegraaff 1996: 211; Campbell 2007: 338).

Hanegraaff (1996: 215) explains this paradox through a dream analogy: the "real" existence is the dreamer in the bed (the Higher Self) but the dreamer can still have several dreams and can develop through them while being unaware of the sleeping entity (the personality). Indeed, Ameeba also raps in the "Vanhasielu" refrain "likely you're dreaming" ("sitä kai siis nukkuu"), although framing it more as everyday dissatisfaction. In the alternative spirituality/New Age context, this has more to do with having forgotten our oneness with consciousness (being asleep) versus being wide awake and in connection with our "true" being (Hanegraaff 1996: 216). Ego is considered as either the outcome or the reason behind this separation (Hanegraaff 1996: 219); "spiritual development means […] to overcome the split and regain consciousness […]" (Hanegraaff 1996: 220). A common New Age belief

[84] See also Pilgrim (1996) and Premasiri (1996) for a thorough discussion on the no-self doctrine and rebirth in Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism.

is that we choose to reincarnate in order to further our spiritual development (Hanegraaff 1996: 235). Hanegraaff (1996: 251) also states that in New Age, "the mind has many levels," entailing that there are various states of lower and higher spirituality which are then located on a continuum, thus "all distinctions and levels are of an illusionary character compared with the ultimate reality of pure spirit" (Hanegraaff 1996: 252). Hanegraaff (1996: 283) claims that New Age reincarnationism is "qualitatively different" from Buddhism and Hinduism, as New Agers consider that, despite the illusory nature of reality, everything should be "experienced to the fullest" in order to benefit from the learning process (Hanegraaff 1996: 262; cf. Campbell 2007: 338). A similar idea comes forth in the lyrics of "Vanhasielu," hence the song can be interpreted to be closer to New Age beliefs than other religious variants.[85]

However, what is the exact type of understanding of reincarnation or transmigration in "Vanhasielu" is unimportant; it is more fruitful to focus on the fact that the video and song feature such culturally constructed ideas and thus build other discourses through these ideas. Equally unimportant to the endeavor of analyzing the song and video are the "actual" thoughts of the artist in this regard, as those thoughts are ultimately unattainable to others and are also shaped by the surrounding culture(s) and social lifeworld shared by others; they do not occur in a vacuum, and hence the ideas are not "purely" the product of the rapper himself. I interpret the song as representing spirituality with a non-dual worldview – the rapper aims to become one with nature as well as the rest of the universe – through which an interesting juxtaposition emerges. In the non-dual philosophical realm where the timelessness of the universal consciousness is key and our connection to it can only be achieved through the present moment, the visual ageing of the rapper in the video is a slight contradiction: the soul doesn't really age but acquires experiences that accumulate wisdom.

5.2.4 Local/universal

Ameeba does not lip-synch all the time while on camera, and therefore when he does, those lines gain extra weight. In the first verse, these lines include for example "but I warn you beforehand there are no road signs" ("mutta varotan etukäteen tienviitat sieltä ontuu"); "everyone has a special route to their garden"

[85] Although Ameeba mentions heaven and hell in the "Vanhasielu" song, the lyrics and the video do not come across as Christian or monotheist, but rather as having some pagan or animistic undertones. The content of contemporary paganism has been debated extensively and scholars are all but uninamous of its definition, however its connection to a global ecological crisis as well as its focus on life cycles are crucial themes (Pearson et al. 1998).

("jokasel oma spessu reitti omalle puutarhalleen"); "compass when the needle points towards the North, you have that homeland touch" ("kompassi kun neula näyttää pohjoseen sul on kotimaan tatsi"); "[sun] guided life" ("[aurinko] ohjas eloa"). He seems to construct a narrative of finding a certain path or way "home," which is then revealed to be the North, while reflecting nostalgically on past times. The "route" according to Ameeba, however, is "special," suggesting it is not the same for everyone. The narration seems to evoke a search for spiritual enlightenment, suggesting an individualistic and pluralistic approach, in other words that methods for achieving enlightenment or a certain level of spiritual consciousness differ from person to person (see Campbell 2007: 337). This is also highly reminiscent of the spiritual seeking commonly present in New Age, discussed earlier in section 4.1.2, but also the trope of a journey is often used to connote examining various sources and religious traditions in the quest for meaning (Sutcliffe 2013: 30–32). Yet the North – the rapper is pointing upwards towards the sky (heaven?) upon uttering the word in the video – is the direction Ameeba literally points out to the viewer as conducive to spiritual understanding, and further perhaps points to the "cosmic significance" of our personal journey in the larger framework of reincarnation (Campbell 2007: 337–338). Ameeba also encourages us to check our compass in order to find our spiritual home. It is possible to make a nationalistic interpretation of such lyrics as "homeland," assuming Ameeba considers Finland as representing the North with spiritual power, but nothing else in this song, or in Ameeba's music in general, points explicitly towards such thinking. Rather, the spiritual themes highlight the universality of a search for inner peace and happiness.

The refrain of the "Vanhasielu" song presents the key ideas of the song (see Appendix 2 for full lyrics):

> Throughout our lives we think about what we're missing
> And don't see what we already have I guess that means sleeping
> Slow down life stay still you're already there
> How can anything matter if you don't care about breathing
> Throughout our lives we wait for everything we're missing
> And don't see what we already have consciousness is sleeping
> Slow down life stay still you're already there
> How can anything matter if you don't care about breathing
>
> *Läpi elämän mietitään mitä meiltä puuttuu*
> *Eikä nähä mitä meil on sitä kai siis nukkuu*
> *Hidasta elämää paikallaan oot jo perillä*
> *Miten mikään vois merkitä jos et välitä hengittää*

Koko elämä odotetaan kaikkee mitä meiltä puuttuu
Eikä nähä mitä meillä jo on tietoisuus nukkuu
Hidasta elämää, paikallaan oot jo perillä
Miten mikään vois merkitä jos et välitä hengittää

("Vanhasielu," Ameeba 2014b)

In the first refrain of "Vanhasielu," Ameeba lip-synchs the phrase "missing and we don't see what we already have" ("puuttuu eikä nähä mitä meil on"). The refrain then continues by asserting that "consciousness is sleeping" ("tietoisuus nukkuu"). It seems that these are the main points of the refrain: the rapper is seen with his eyes closed – thus literally not seeing – in the short moment after these lines. The refrain refers to an insatiable human desire for more, and our general focus in life on what we don't have instead of what we do have. The second main point of the song and of the refrain, is also lip-synched: "[stay] still you're already there" ("paikallaan oot jo perillä"), in other words that while we have perhaps lost touch with our inner selves and connection with nature, by slowing down life ("hidasta elämää") we can regain this universal spiritual connection (cf. Lynch 2007: 56–57) which, according to an immediatist viewpoint, is available to us in the here and now (Versluis 2014). This spiritual idea of already being one with the universal consciousness and the accessability of it is highly common in neo-Hinduism in particular. Teachers such as Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta along with Western spiritual teachers such as Eckhart Tolle have preached that nothing is needed to achieve enlightenment, as we already are manifestations of the one, non-dual consciousness and can thus attain happiness here and now. The lip-synched parts in the second refrain are more or less the same as in the first, further highlighting the central message of the song.

The refrain also unfolds yet another important aspect of time: slowing down is necessary for us in order to realize spiritual truths, the idea that "you are already there." Visually this is highlighted through several slow motion sequences. Slow life, or downshifting as it is often now called, has become trendy in Western culture lately as a way of increasing personal well-being, and as religious studies scholar Monica Emerich (2012) argues, it is often combined with ecologically sustainable lifestyle choices. This discourse around healthy and "conscious" lifestyles often puts emphasis on balancing the (individual) mind, body, and spirit, with a "distinctly spiritual tone" and individuals are urged to "recognize the holistic nature of social, environmental and personal sustainability [...] living simply or slowly is consciousness" (Emerich 2012: 45). This discourse is precisely the tool for mainstreaming the idea of holistic non-dualism (Emerich 2012: 47) which is

visible in "Vanhasielu" as well[86] and in Ameeba's nature religion generally (see 4.1.1).

Yet Ameeba does not seem to refer solely to the kind of slowing down which arises from Western privileged life and aims at individual well-being, but rather encourages living in the current moment in order to achieve a spiritual insight, and to surrender to the nature and comply with it, like he himself is seemingly portrayed doing in the video. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that the video features an anti-technology stance – both the song and the video have been manufactured with the crucial help of technology – it does not endorse consumerism. Taking the video shoot to a peripheral area also underscores a countercultural idea and a resistance towards dominant narratives and lifestyles.

At the same time, the nearly stereotypic connection of Finnish people with nature is exacerbated in the video with the quasi-ecstatic twirling of the rapper at the mercy of the hostile cold northern winter winds, the winds further accentuated by the synthesizers throughout the song, as well as the husky dogs that surround and befriend him. This also further connects Ameeba's song with ambient style of music which has been used in several religious traditions to achieve altered, ecstatic states, helping to challenge the boundaries between "sacred and profane" (Till 2017: 327–328). Ameeba is reminiscent of a shaman agitating himself to a trance state, while enduring the extreme northern circumstances; shamanism is of course one central facet of Sámi religious life, who in Finland, Scandinavia, and Russia live mostly in the Northern parts, as well as of Native peoples around the world. Soul travel is a crucial part of shamanism, as the soul is purported to transcend the different levels of reality (Puttick 2004: 292). Also, while the vast wilderness is often considered intimidating, in the Finnish cultural imagination it has also been seen to offer spiritual refuge and shelter (Roiko-Jokela 2000: 18). Religious studies scholar Veikko Anttonen (1994: 33) calls forests and wilderness as one of the most fundamental metaphors in human culture for the "mythology of oneness," the connection and relationship between an infinite whole and its parts. Similarly, Ameeba appears to find spiritual connection in the vast wilderness in the video. The video also features images of (camp) fire and water (open lake), both of which are symbols of spiritual transformation (Anttonen 1994: 29).

In the second verse, we begin to see sun light in the video. We are well into this second verse before the first lip-synched phrase, "[not] ashamed to be old" ("[ei]

[86] "Living more slowly for my informants means carefully considering everything they do, buy, eat, and use. [...] By mending the divisions and dualism among mind, body and spirit, the holistic self is able to go on to heal the world. The media's job is to articulate this holism, the non-dualism of physicality and spirit; of global and local; of self, society, and the natural world." (Emerich 2012: 47.)

hävetä olla vanha"), manifests, establishing once again the theme of ageing. After this (at 03:51), we see Ameeba rapping only as a black silhouette against the Nordic winter sun, which in late January barely rises above the horizon at all.[87] The sunset seems to depict the "old" rapper's life coming to its end, although in reality he is just slightly over 30 years old in the video. The sun appearing during this second verse can be interpreted to suggest that Ameeba is close to enlightenment and thus the end of transmigration and life cycle (*samsara*). The rapper is now reminiscent of a monk or another type of spiritual seeker cloaked in dark clothes and a hood that conceal his form, reducing him to an anonymous oracle or shaman dropping knowledge. The idea of his enlightenment is further supported by the very end of the video, where the final shot is a close up of him turning away from the camera towards the sunset sky so that his black silhouette (see **Figure 13** below) becomes a formless black thing, as though he assimilates into the universe, becoming one with it.

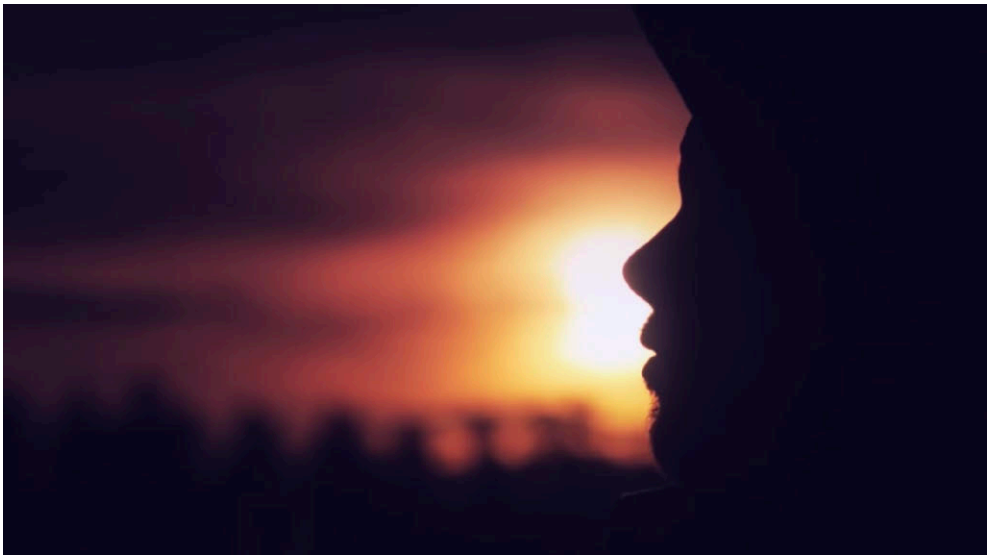

Figure 13. "Vanhasielu" (Ameeba 2014b): Silhouette of the rapper-oracle near the end of the video, potentially also near the end of his transmigratory journey (03:51).

In the third and final refrain, the only phrase Ameeba utters for the camera is "paikallaan oot jo perillä"; "[stay] still you're already there," which he accentuates with his hands as if to stop the viewer right where they are so they remain still. The dog sled is seen to nearly sink in the snow, as the dogs struggle to move forward,

[87] On some of the obscuring qualities and cultural connotations of Northern light as depicted in music, see Torvinen & Välimäki (2019).

giving a more concrete meaning to "hidasta elämää," slow down life (or slow life) heard simultaneously in the lyrics – no need to struggle and stumble forward anymore. The last refrain ends, and we see the dark silhouette of the rapper-oracle close his mouth. We then see a slow motion of him kissing the dog which the tremolo and crescendo of the synthesized strings accentuates. The slow motion moulds the affectionate gesture into a characterizing moment; the rapper is portrayed as a friend of animals and by extension in touch with nature and committed to its protection. This characterization was already constructed earlier in the video when we saw the rapper pet the dog on multiple occasions. These images can also be interpreted as underlining Ameeba's ecocritical style of music.

Although the video is clearly local and focused on the north of Finland, it is also universally about human nature and nature at large, as well as about our connection with and presence within the world. The video ends with only a couple of close ups of the rapper seemingly being blown into the wind, while the focus is in dogs. There are quite a few puppies, which suggests new life, birth and rebirth. The video is so embedded in discourses around the North that it becomes nearly stereotypic. Yet the animals, and particularly the rapper's visible connection with the dog he is seen to pet several times in the video – which then became his own dog after the video shoot – appears genuine and thus renders the portrayal more authentic and realistic. The immediacy highlights the connection between nature and the rapper, both visually and lyrically. The beat ceases almost a full minute before the end of the song, giving prominence to a simple melody played four times with (programmed) strings. The string melody at the end lifts us up and leaves us there, lacking the tonic, thus avoiding a masculine ending with release (cf. McClary 2002). As femininity in music (and elsewhere) has often been associated with softness or weakness but also with a refusal of hegemonic ideas (McClary 2002), the "feminine" ending can be seen to strip the song of any notions of hard (rap) masculinity as do the images of the (male) rapper expressing affection towards the dog and surrendering to the nature (culturally often assigned female), thus showing vulnerability. Equally, this lack of tonal resolution seemingly refuses a linear worldview with a clear ending; the music invites the listener to live forever instead.

If we consider Lehtola's (2007: 359) argument according to which in Lapland everyone is small and bare at the mercy of nature, the area may thus offer a place for serious soul searching and surrendering to nature, in other words letting go. The idea of letting go of one's ego and desires is also central in Eastern spirituality. In the video, southern life is disregarded in favor of northern wilderness while the images demand us to understand that we cannot tame the North but must surrender instead. Ameeba seems to surrender by whirling along with the wind, and becoming one with it (see also the beginning of the song where his voice blends with the wind sound effect).

It appears that the video and song construct an authenticity discourse which could be seen closer to folk authenticity rather than rap authenticity in the traditional sense of urban street credibility[88]; popular music scholar Tim Wall (2003:30) describes folk authenticity as "an alternative to our modern […] industrialised world […] past […] organic ways of life." Wall (2003: 31) describes folk songs in the early twentieth century as vehicles used by "radical intellectuals" to create a counter-culture that aimed at changing the social and political climate. Country music and folk music, among other genres, are well-known for their use of the authenticity trope. Most often than not, this has entailed that the music is not only described as "rural," but old and "traditional," and that at least in the past, the songs were made and performed by people who had lived in the places where the songs originated (Barker & Taylor 2007: 53). Folk authenticity, like so many musical authenticities, is about "returning" to the "authentic" and "natural" expression and culture from which we've become estranged. This seems to be in opposition to postmodern musical authenticities, described by Sarah Thornton for example, where club cultures and technologies are at the center (Thornton 1995; cf. Wall 2003: 32). This also suits Partridge's (2004: 77) observation that according to the viewpoint of new spirituality, we have a lot to learn from previous times regarding spirituality and that "the modern period has seen a regression rather than progression" in this sense. The lyrics of "Vanhasielu" evoke a similar narrative, as analyzed above, idealizing past life and a return to nature as well as "authentic" spirituality, creating a kind of personal utopia.

5.2.5 Personal utopia

The dreamlike state in the video, created by the echoes, exquisite beauty, and slow-motion, suggests that one is watching a dream the rapper is having, a dream about spiritually enlightened slow life. The surrealism in the video fits neatly into the definition offered by Richardson (2012: 46): "surrealism is not the antithesis of realism but rather its extension and transformation." It is essentially the "intensified realism" (see Richardson 2012: 47) of "Vanhasielu" which reveals that the images of the video are culturally constructed ideas and fantasies. This entails that the borders between oppositions and between what is real and what is imagined are blurred (Richardson 2012: 47, 68).

[88] Indeed, in some of Ameeba's Facebook updates and during our conversations, he has mentioned that he does not really identify as a rap artist or at least not as a generic one, and speaks occasionally about "rap" in a belittling manner (evoking the discourse about "rap-rap"), hence it seems logical that he may wish to avoid rap clichés in his music. This applies also to the other artists of this study, Euro Crack and Khid, to some extent.

In conclusion, the juxtaposed concepts of landscapes/soundscapes, local/universal, and ageing/timelessness reveal that what we see in the video is not real although it unfolds almost like a documentary, but rather the imagination of the rapper and a constructed image of inner, personal, authentic storytelling. It is his utopia, his landscapes, and his dreams and life story that *seem* to unfold before our eyes and ears. A utopia can be defined as an imagined, ideal(ized) state of affairs, or as a critique which contains the power for change and for dismantling current societal and cultural structures (Välimäki 2015: 12–15); in "Vanhasielu," Ameeba's utopia appears as a spiritually enlightened world where the human connection with nature and the universe has been fully restored. In Ameeba's art more generally, critical, even apocalyptic views of contemporary society are offered but with hopes of furthering a change where nature acts as the symbol of countercultural thinking (cf. Beyer 1998: 18).

Coming back to the beginning and theories about North and Northenness, "[the North is] both an imagined discursive construct and an embodied subjectivity, thus creating a paradox between reality and representation" (Riches et al. 2016: 1). The audiovisual zooming seemingly into the rapper's soul in "Vanhasielu," bare under the vast Northern skies as he raps about ordeals and pain he has gone through in the song, renders the video intimate, nearly too intimate via the close ups and lingering slow-motion captures when they are further combined with the soft, echoing vocal delivery – an interesting juxtaposition of "close" and "distant" imagery and sound (cf. van Leeuwen 1999: 133). Also, it becomes evident that the rapper himself is not actually old, but rather someone who perhaps aspires to be or feels old and hence wiser and closer to spiritual enlightenment. Following Grace (2002: 185), the North serves here as the backdrop for a story about a man fleeing from his southern life in search of "solitude or physical or spiritual adventure […]." The song appears to exhibit the "deep rap" subgenre discussed above (see subchapter 4.3).

Even though we are dealing with realistic footage, the extreme beauty and seeming purity of the landscapes makes the video appear surreal. Indeed, Lehtola (2007: 359) concludes that Lapland in songs is a personal utopia. Lehtola (2007: 359) also notes that the stereotypes surrounding Lapland, where humans have been erased in favor of the wild landscapes, are nearly always positive. In the Finnish context at least, Ameeba's video can appear as stereotyping the often assumed connection of Finnish people with nature, while potentially authenticating his music as connected to Finnishness and Finland.

In comparison to the other two videos analyzed in this study, "Vanhasielu" is visually full of light, whereas "Kräkkäkränkkä" and "Luoti" underscore gloomy, urban, even filthy landscapes. What makes this dreamlike video even more interesting is that in real life, the song was written in the capital city in the south where the rapper also lives, and the dog we see him embracing became his own pet since the filming of the video. I have also met the dog in question several times. If

considering my position as a researcher focusing on authenticity, it is sometimes indeed challenging to differentiate between the person one comes to know during field work (off-stage), and the artist persona on-stage and in other performances such as videos. We obviously cannot know what the relationship between the artist's real life and the storytelling in the music is, though clearly they are not one and the same. Music is always a performance of something. What draws the attention here is the constructed authenticity and simultaneous continuity and congruence between the artist persona and the persona created in the lyrics. The images of Finnish Lapland/Sápmi, nature and wilderness, while feeding the clichés of Finnishness and Finland and the stereotype of the male wanderer at the mercy of Nordic nature, also authenticate the video in a crucial way as something created by a Finnish underground rapper who frequently raps about nature and spirituality. The utopia(nness) of the video's world is portrayed by the juxtapositions evident in its audiovisual storytelling. On the one hand, it projects an image of a person strongly connected to nature and reflects nostalgia for past times and assumed "harmonious, symbiotic relationship with Gaia" (Partridge 2004: 77), yet the soundscape with synthesized echoes clearly denotes futuristic atmospheres and thus ultimately, the video seems to take us to the future rather than the past.

5.3 "Luoti": deconstructing gangster authenticity

In this subchapter, I analyze how Khid attempts to deconstruct the discourse on hip hop authenticity through the use of hypermasculine gangster aesthetics and stereotypes. This close reading has been informed by my interview with the artist (Khid i2015) slightly more than the other two video analyses in this chapter. I read the "Luoti" ("Bullet," Khid x RPK 2014b) video as an audiovisual portrayal of Khid's atheistic stance towards hip hop authenticity norms; atheism functions as a metaphor for denouncing hip hop's authenticity ideology, its hypermasculinity, and more broadly, repressive ways of thinking. In its place, Khid appears to offer a more individual and broadminded way of thinking, releasing particularly male rappers from the constraints of their rap egos. Sonically and visually, the song draws from a variety of subgenres of rap, such as Memphis rap and grime. The structure of the song represents a clear cut verse-refrain form, intro ABAB outro. Each verse contains 32 bars. The song key is E minor and tempo 138 bpm. The song was written by Khid, and produced by RPK. (See Appendix 3 for details.)

The music video for the Khid and RPK song "Luoti" ("Bullet," Khid x RPK 2014b) was released in February 2014. The song features on their collaborative album *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) which was released that same year. The video was shot on a theater stage in Helsinki by Teemu Antero from Balansia Films. The total length of the video is four minutes three seconds (04:03).

The first section (5.3.1) below provides two interview extracts where Khid describes the "Luoti" song as a critique of hip hop's hypermasculinity and gangsterism. In the latter sections, I read the video through the concepts of gangsterism (5.3.2), death (5.3.3), and as an "atheistic" view on hip hop authenticity (5.3.4).

5.3.1 Critiquing hypermasculinity

Hypermasculinity in hip hop can be defined as an aggressive form of masculinity built on heteronormative male domination, benefitting from and perpetuating the sexism and misogyny that patriarchal societal structures uphold (Morgan 1999; Pough et al. eds. 2007; Rose 2008; Jeffries 2011). Hip hop gangsterism, in turn, according to Jeffries (2011: 77) is "fundamentally concerned with the performer's ability to assume a dangerous persona who is willing to injure and exploit others." In the "Luoti" ("Bullet," Khid x RPK 2014b) video and song, Khid assumes a gangster persona with a violent agenda, but flips the gangster stereotype in order to deconstruct hip hop's hypermasculinity and critique hip hop's ideology of authenticity. The video and song aim to do this via using aesthetics familiar from gangsta rap, such as gun shots, bullets, and killing/death, albeit on a rather metaphorical level. Khid has stated that the purpose of "Luoti" as a video and song was to steal gangster gun symbolism and use it as a metaphor for "something completely different" (Schildt 2014). Below Khid explains the idea behind the song:

> KHID: That song is mainly just about, all types of tough-guy acts piss me off. Like that there's a person who actually thinks it's a good thing to be a tough guy. So it's more just a critique of that tough-guy act and some kind of machismo. [...] Like there are all kinds of lines that [...] refer to that. [...] There's for example "tough guys talk no need for Cupid no need for love and no need for help in distress" so that too is just about [...] pretending to be tougher because it's just [...] with that acting you can influence how others see you [...] I felt like writing a critique of that.
>
> *KHID: Se [Luoti] biisi on lähinnä vaa kertoo, mua vituttaa kaikenlaine kovistelu. Siis sellane et on joku ihminen joka oikeesti kelaa [että] on hyvä juttu olla kova jätkä. Nii se on enemmän vaan kritiikkii sellaselle kovistelulle ja jolleki machoilulle. […] Et siinähä on kaikkii lainei jotka […] viittaa semmoseen. […] Siin on vaik se että "kovat jäbät jauhaa ei tarvii Cupidoo ei tarvii rakkautta eikä tarvii apuu ahdinkoon" ni seki on vaan semmone että […] [e]sittää kovempaa ku on vaan siks et […] sillä omalla esittämisellä vois vaikuttaa siihen millasena muut sut näkee […] mun teki mieli kirjottaa sille kritiikki.*
>
> (Khid i2015)

According to Khid, the central idea of "Luoti" was to critique the macho boasting of some men, assumably rappers in particular. He frames machismo as an inauthentic role ("acting"), asserting that the main reason certain individuals engage in such performances is to gain recognition from others and to construct a certain image for themselves. The issue of hypermasculinity and the sexism and misogyny related to it has been a pertinent topic in (particularly feminist) scholarly works on hip hop (Rose 1994; 2008; Pough et al. eds. 2007; Jeffries 2011; Berggren 2014; Kehrer 2017), thus Khid's critique is far from unique, but it is nevertheless rare that a male artist engages in such a discussion.

There are numerous cultural connections between guns and masculinity (e.g. Cukier & Sheptycki 2012). Khid applying and playing with these rather strong cultural links in his song and video may be considered an efficient tool for constructing a critique of hypermasculinity given that in hip hop in particular, the associations between guns, urban violence, and masculine power play are strong (Kubrin 2005; Quinn 2005; Rose 2008: 48). Criminologist and hip hop scholar Charis Kubrin (2005: 371–372) in her analysis of over four hundred rap songs notes that "[f]irearms are often used to claim the identity of being among the toughest" but that guns are also "an everyday accessory in the ghetto." Hip hop's hypermasculinity and ghettocentricity is thus constructed through guns – and frequently attached to poor black males, effectively contributing to racist stereotypes of black men as violent (McLeod 1999; Rose 2008; Jeffries 2011; cf. also Sandve 2014: 51–53).

Kubrin (2005: 375) further notes that "[rap] lyrics instruct listeners that toughness and the willingness to use violence are central to establishing viable masculine identity, gaining respect, and building a reputation." Ogbar (2007: 7) and Pinn (1999) among others also speak about the construction of credibility[89] by so-called hardcore rappers who highlight their toughness in connection with the realities of dangerous, underprivileged urban spaces; thus they also touch upon the common notion of hard masculinity as a necessity for hip hop authenticity and "keeping it real" which Khid purports to criticize. Ghettocentricity and value and credibility afforded to descriptions of lived experience in hip hop are crucially related to how hip hop originated as a voice of the underprivileged, featuring for example rappers' experiences of living amidst gang violence and drug trade (Rose 1994; 2008; Keyes 2002; Forman 2002; Quinn 2005; cf. McLeod 1999). Despite this so-called ghetto authenticity, as Utley (2012) and Jeffries (2011) note, hip hop's gangsta persona is essentially a performed character drawing from violent realities. Utley (2012: 4) argues that

[89] Yet, Anttonen (2017a: 25) argues that authenticity and credibility can be seen as somewhat distinct: "credibility is to some extent a learnable skill that comes with the profession of musicianship […][a]uthenticity, on the other hand, is more slippery[…]."

> [d]espite claims of reality, the gangsta is not a real person. Instead, the gangsta is an extremely irreverent embodiment of the distorted and tumultuous environment from which it came […]. Even removed from its origins, the gangsta is an enduring identity that allows youth to imagine themselves as authoritative figures. Although the gangsta is not real, gangsta […] is any rapper who portrays him or herself to be an impenetrable force of nature […] in an urban landscape […].

While Khid does not directly connect hypermasculinity with authenticity in the interview extract above, this connection can be read between the lines as it was also something he mentioned explicitly later in another interview; he stated that his song "Ateisti," ("Atheist") has an anti-authenticity idea behind it (Khid i2016). Hypermasculinity in hip hop was discussed briefly in section 4.1.3 above where I concluded that Khid's atheism also functions as a metaphor for denouncing hip hop's authenticity ideology and other "traditional" and repressive ways of thinking, while Khid purports to offer a more individual and broadminded way of thinking. A similar idea appears to be constructed audiovisually through the trope of gangsterism in the "Luoti" video, as discussed below. This link between hypermasculinity and authenticity is also strongly established in research. In addition to Ogbar's (2007) and Jeffries' (2011) discussion on the connections between authenticity and aggressive masculinity, one of McLeod's (1999: 142) six dimensions of the authenticity discourse is gender-sexual, the assumption being that "within hip-hop, being a real man does not merely entail having the proper sex organ: it means acting in a masculine manner." Particularly in the 1990s' hip hop scene, such behavior was attached to homophobia and "not being a 'pussy'" (McLeod 1999: 142). Heteronormative cisgender masculinity can still today be said to be a hip hop standard for authenticity (Kehrer 2017: 20). While the homophobic tendencies in hip hop have arguably subsided to an extent, as evidenced for example by the recent successes of openly LGBTQIA+ artists in hip hop such as Silvana Imam, Young M.A, and Mykki Blanco, sexism and misogyny continue to thrive.

Critiquing normative ideas in hip hop is also a demand for broader thinking. The refrain of the "Luoti" song repeats the phrase "päästä avaruutes vapaaks" ("set your space free"). While the Finnish word "avaruus" in its everyday meaning translates to (outer) space, the song mainly refers to the mind:

> INKA: [...] in that song there was something like "set your space free" [...]
> KHID: Yeah. And like space mean[s] that whereas space is, a place, then space is of course [...] in a way the opposite of confined. So also in the refrain for example it's kind of a metaphor for human's inner space. But also just mind's

spaciousness. Like broad-mindedness. The song references broad-mindedness with that space word.

INKA: […] siinä biisissä oli jotain ”päästä avaruutes vapaaks” […]
KHID: Joo. Ja siis avaruus tarkot[taa] et siin missä avaruus on paikka niin avaruus on tottakai […] tavallaan ahtaan vastakohta. Niin se on siinä kertosäkeessä esimerkiks ni se on tavallaan metafora sille ihmisen jolleki sisäiselle avaruudelle. Mutta myös vaan mielen avaruudelle. Siis avomielisyydelle. Avomielisyyteen viitataan siinä biisissä sillä avaruus sanalla.

(Khid i2015)

According to Khid, “space” in the song’s lyrics is a reference to broad-mindedness. While Khid does not actually use the Finnish word “avarakatseinen” which also translates to broadminded, it comes to mind as the word has the same root as “avaruus” (“space”) and same connotation of being open as described by Khid. Below, I provide a reading of the “Luoti” video through this idea of setting one’s mind free in connection to authenticity and gangsterism.

The song introduces the idea that Khid aims to free a person’s mind from the belief that hypermasculinity equals hip hop authenticity, thus offering release from suffering caused by hip hop’s authenticity ideology. In the following sections, I analyze how hypermasculinity is first constructed (5.3.2) and then deconstructed (5.3.3) in the video’s audiovisual and lyrical expressions, and particularly how Khid and RPK (who produced the song) use gangsta rap’s aesthetics, and further, how atheism functions metaphorically as a critique of hip hop’s authenticity discourse (5.3.4).

5.3.2 Aesthetics of gangsterism

The video begins with an animation (00:00–00:07) of rainbow colored soundwaves placed horizontally against a dark background, while dark red translucent waves appear to be moving over this image vertically. The beginning introduces the production company’s name (Balansia Films) above the waves, and the artists and the song name below it. From there onwards, the video is completely monochrome black-and-white, which is a highly aestheticized choice, but also underscores the gloomy, metallic clang of the looped synthesized beats, seemingly referencing gangsta rap’s sinister world. Additionally, given this violent framework of hip hop gangsterism in the video, the coloring can also be seen to allude to the grim, crime-filled *noir* genre in cinema and literature. We then first see a middle shot of Khid against a black background and a blinking white light illuminating his face, which is likely a strobe light but unlike with the normal flickering of strobe distorting

vision, the slow motion leaves ample time to observe Khid's appearance. The entire introduction is in slow motion, further underscoring the ominous overall feel of the song and building up expectations that something terrible is about to happen.

Khid is first seen looking to the side, then in the next frame he looks straight at the camera and points at it with his index finger, arm straight, like aiming with a gun (see **Figure 14** below). The gesture informs us that violence, potentially life threatening kind, may be imminent. Khid's name, written in white letters, flashes over the image. RPK, the beat maker, is then introduced with the letters of his artist name delineating his image, as though we are looking through a window. He is also seen pointing index fingers to various directions yet his arms are loose, establishing his complicity to Khid and his seemingly violent agenda. Both rappers then stand next to each other (at 00:22), further underlining that the song is their collaborative effort. The music consists of heavily echoed, slightly drone-like synthesizers, video game samples, and two different gun cocking samples which function as snares along with indistinct male(?) shouts. At the end of the 26-second-long introduction, the voice seems to say "vakaa," meaning steady, three times while the pitch is increasingly lowered after each time.

The lowered pitch of the male voices along with the video game sound effects suggests robotic and futuristic aspects, while the occasional marching band rhythm of the snare drums demands the listener's attention and focus, perhaps even submission to the commands of Khid and RPK. RPK's agency as the beat maker is established in the video by showing him airplaying a keyboard or a controller. The piercing drums but particularly the heavily synthetic distorted bass and the spacy reverb highlight the visual griminess and dirtiness of the video; it further contributes to the rappers' appearance as dangerous thugs. The corporeality of bass can also be seen to relate to power and aggressiveness, but it is also often gendered masculine (Partridge 2012: 188) which is why the sound contributes to the construction of hypermasculinity and gangster trope in the song. Focusing on dub but talking more generally about bass music culture, Partridge (2012: 189) asserts that such bass-heavy music connotes "violence and suffering," rooted specifically in black suffering (cf. the discussion about cultural appropriation below).

The first verse begins with the sound of a gun shot releasing the tension built up by the intro and we see a close up of only Khid's mouth and jaw rapping the lyrics, now in real time. Khid raps in a rather monotonous, detached voice throughout the song, carefully pronouncing each word and adding slight emphasis on rhyming words to accentuate his message. Not seeing his eyes in this part of the video also adds to the feeling of detachedness, as though we were watching a machine uttering commands for us instead of having a (one-sided) conversation. This detachedness in "Luoti" becomes all the more apparent when compared to the intimate close ups in Ameeba's "Vanhasielu" video analyzed above. Particularly the prominent distorted sub bass creates an ominous mood for the song, along with complex drum patterns

with various snare and hi-hat hits which construct a sense of unpredictability and danger. We also hear more samples of indistinct male shouts and occasional video game and gun cocking sounds, which construct the idea that someone is perhaps being hurt or getting shot, as carelessly and suddenly as might happen in a video game. These kinds of sounds are also characteristic of the grime subgenre.

During the first verse, the images of Khid and RPK switch between middle shots in front of a grey background featuring the lightning-looking cover image of the album *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) with smoke in front of it (see **Figure 15** below), and close ups in front of a blank white background. Alternately we see animations of bullets (see **Figure 17** in the next section) which, like the lightning image, can be seen to connote danger. Visual effects, such as shadows and blinking, are used elaborately and are partially synchronized with the beats, further adding to the impression of aggressiveness. For example, the lightning image appears in the background on several occasions simultaneously with a strobe effect, creating an impression of a real lightning. In comparison to the other two videos analyzed above, "Luoti" is perhaps the most minimalist: no natural environments are depicted, instead the rappers are constantly seen against a post-produced background, or replaced by bullet animations. The video only uses close ups and middle shots, filming the artists from the waist up, thus the only action we see is their hands moving in the air, mostly with pointed index fingers (see Figures 14–15 below) reminiscent of guns.

Figure 14. "Luoti" (Khid x RPK 2014b): Khid pointing his fingers like a gun, referencing rap's hypermasculine gangster tropes (00:13).

Figure 15. "Luoti" (Khid x RPK 2014b): RPK and Khid against the lightning background (01:26).

In addition to grime, Khid has mentioned Memphis rap as a genre influence. Memphis rap often features dark beats and a slower, non-dance-oriented tempo, thus the subgenre is sometimes characterized as minimalist in comparison to other rap genres. Here of interest is also the fact that some of Memphis rap has been influenced by so-called horrorcore rap and vice versa (Robinson 2010: 564–566; Westhoff 2011: 89); horrorcore parodies gangsta rap with morbid images which is slightly reminiscent of the parodic way(s) in which these themes are used in "Luoti." The audiovisual experience with "Luoti" is somewhat similar to watching a horror movie: the dark, grey coloring blends with gangsterism and its violent soundscape. Even the hip hop inspired clothes of the rappers feature dark colors so as not to disrupt the somber, threatening mood. Khid is wearing a black hoodie and a black snapback with "actual pain" written on it in capital letters (see Figure 14 above), insinuating he is not afraid of pain (or death, see 5.3.3 below). RPK wears a dark colored T-shirt, sun glasses, a snap back, and prayer bead style necklace, occasionally also an Adidas track suit jacket with white stripes (see Figure 15 above).

In the audiovisual gangsta aesthetics of the "Luoti" video, we can see a performance related to what performance studies scholar W.B. Worthen (1998: 1104) calls "a simultaneous invocation and displacement of the 'original.'" Hip hop sounds, fashion, and bodily gestures that are borrowed from the now global hip hop culture, much of which originates in the US, is not usually openly discussed as

appropriation in Finland.[90] As Jeffries (2011: 9) notes, appropriation of hip hop's cultural traits is not limited to black culture, but more specifically is an appropriation of black masculinity. Jeffries (2011: 8) addresses white rappers' gangsta pose critically, as he states that through hip hop, they may "live 'dangerously in the limbic sensuality of the outlaw culture' without any of the material consequences that young black men identified with hip hop must deal with […]." Khid aims at offering critical commentary of the Finnish rappers' gangsta pose via the "Luoti" video, yet is also well aware that some (or most) people will not be able to decipher this critique in the song when he raps "dedicated to all those who don't understand a word of this" ("omistettu kaikille jotka ei ymmärrä täst sanakaa"), showing humor but perhaps also awareness of the lack of conversation regarding cultural appropriation of US hip hop's hypermasculinity and gangster tropes in Finland.

Often local appropriation or "indigenization" of the hip hop expression is central for it to be considered "authentic" (Forman 2002; Bennett 2004: 188). The "Luoti" song is localized with references to Finnish suburbs and with Finnish mythological and cultural signifiers, thus distancing the video's gangsta pose from US hip hop. Khid references "Tuonela," the name for the realm of death in the Finnish mythology and folklore, including in the national epic, poetry collection Kalevala.[91] The narration becomes further solidified into the Finnish culture with reference to "living under the North star" and "Ursa Major" in the lyrics: both astronomical entities hold an important place in the Finnish national-romantic and religious imagination as they are recurring tropes in Finnish literature and popular music,[92] and are culturally attached to people living near arctic areas and their mythologies (Pentikäinen 1994: 11). Khid also mentions the Finnish suburbs ("lähiö") in the song which can be considered as the Finnish equivalent of "hood" (cf. Forman 2002) in US hip hop. This suburban or urban experience is also a recurrent trope in Finnish hip hop storytelling, hence addressing it arguably renders Khid's message more understandable for local listeners. More importantly, these localizing tropes

[90] To my knowledge (as a hip hop journalist, researcher, and practitioner in the Finnish hip hop scene), there have been no public discussions about how or why Finnish rappers appropriate or even imitate US hip hop's sonic and visual features. When I have personally attempted to ask about this as a radio host, the reluctance of artists to answer the question has been evident. The issue has been addressed to some extent in research by Kärjä (2011) regarding white Finnish rappers, and by Westinen (2016) and Himma (2016) for example regarding rappers of color.

[91] For more on the Kalevala mythology see for example Pentikäinen (1989).

[92] Täällä Pohjan tähden alla (published as an English translation under the title Under the North Star) is a trilogy novel (1959–1962) by Väinö Linna depicting Finnish rural people's history amidst wars and their subsequent traumas. It is also the name of numerous Finnish schlager albums, including ones by renowned singer-athlete Tapio Rautavaara and actor-singer Vesa-Matti Loiri.

culturally detach the narration from US hip hop, thus Khid appears to be addressing Finnish masculinity and its (violent) history in particular.

The video features bullets in abundance, highlighting the song's name and message, yet no actual guns are in sight except Khid's and RPK's fingers which act as gun barrels (see Figures 14 and 15 above). These are seen several times, especially in the beginning and when the refrain begins. By exhibiting bullets with their phallic shape and potentially dangerous effects, the video constructs the trope of gangsta masculinity, but is careful not to cross the boundaries of metaphor into actually showing guns or shooting. In the beginning of each verse, we hear a bang reminiscent of a gunshot. Similar but less prominent sound effects are used throughout the "Luoti" song; the gun cocking and firing sounds are used as snare beats. Such violent sounds warn us of the arrival of the rumbling bass and the lyrics seemingly dealing with death. Visually, Khid is almost constantly surrounded by small pieces reminiscent of post-gunshot residue and smoke floating in the air, thus visually confirming that a gun was very likely fired. Smoke is also a trope well-known in hip hop in various forms, whether as smoke coming from recently fired gun, a joint, or smoke machine in live performances. This aestheticization of visual and sonic "dirtiness" constructs the impression of dismal urban realities in the video, a strong contrast for example to the purity of nature seen in Ameeba's "Vanhasielu."

In addition to the sonic and visual references, the song lyrics feature various insinuations about killing something with a gun. Such expressions as "mouth tastes like bullet holes," "last breath," "gun sights towards the chest," "erases fingerprints," and "I leave the crime scene" (see Appendix 3 for full lyrics) strongly suggest that Khid's agenda is a violent one, as Khid constantly constructs his gangster role through his lyrics. Also reminiscent of criminality and constructing the gangster discourse is Khid's fully covering pantyhose-like mask seen a few times in the video during the second verse (at 01:50–01:54, 02:04–02:07, and 02:43–02:46). The images were shot with Khid's mouth moving while his head was placed against a canvas. As Jeffries (2011: 88) notes, "[t]hug narratives embrace the criminal label and stretch its meaning," and similarly here the gangsta aesthetics appear to be related to the rap genre's conventional braggadocio rather than lived reality, the meaning of killing referring to something other than physical death (see section 5.3.3).

Khid and RPK's usage of the gangsta aesthetics and discourse of gun violence in the video under analysis seem like an attempt at hip hop "coolness" (Jeffries 2011: 60–62) with its complex contradictions (Jeffries 2011; Rose 1994), as they portray clear genre-specific aspects in their performance such as their clothing, body movement, and beats (cf. Auslander 2004: 5; cf. Frith 1996: 92). Yet their lyrics about actually *being* a thug are scarce, and the song criticizes

hypermasculinity in hip hop and rap as explained by Khid. In the first verse, Khid raps with a sarcastic tone about "tough guys" who claim they do not need love or help from anyone (see Appendix 3). Rappers who rap about love have historically been ridiculed as being "soft" (McLeod 1999: 142), and Khid's plays with this idea of hard masculinity as supposedly defining hip hop authenticity. Through such audiovisual means as described above, the song establishes masculine gangster tropes as the norm in hip hop. Khid constructs himself as representing the opposite of such stereotypes and norms, calling himself an "alien since day one" ("alust asti muukalainen") in the song. This is necessary in order for his message, a critique of hypermasculinity, to gain weight and credibility, as he cannot become associated with the kind of rappers he criticizes.[93] Also other hip hop conventions appear to be criticized: Khid rap's "what do I need freestyle for when my mind is free" ("mihin mä tarviin freestailii ku on mieli vapaana") which can be interpreted as a reference to freestyle rapping. Khid appears to assert that he does not need to rehearse improvisatory rapping techniques in order to free himself as a rapper, as he has already been freed.

Interestingly, Monica Miller (2015 [2011]: 71) notes that, in order to deal with societal and structural limitations of life, "hustlers have learned to develop mental freedom"; Khid's gangsta persona with his free mind seems to fit this characterization, too. Khid encourages others with free minds to celebrate with him by throwing their hands in air, a well known trope from hip hop parties, with the phrase "throw your hands in the air if you feel a loss in your soul" ("heitä kädet ilmaan jos tunnet sielussas häviön") in the first verse. Sensing that there is a hole or a loss in our soul does not seem like something worth celebrating, and this seemingly contradictory phrase is thus one of the revelatory moments in the song which indicates that the gangsterism and other "hard" aesthetics in the song are parodic.

The refrain goes:

Throw your hands in the air (in the air)
Gun sights towards the chest (the chest)
Load (load)

[93] By this, I am not presuming that gangsta rappers generally speak truthfully. As Kelley (1996: 121) accurately notes, "[w]hen the imagery of crime and violence is not used metaphorically, exaggerated and invented boasts of criminal acts should be regarded as part of a larger set of signifying practices. Performances [...] are supposed to be humorous and, to a certain extent, unbelievable. Growing out of a much older set of cultural practices, these masculinist narratives are essentially verbal duels over who is the 'baddest motherfucker around.' They are not meant as literal descriptions of violence and aggression, but connote the playful use of language itself."

Hand steady (steady)
Set your space free (free)

Heitä sun kädet ilmaan (ilmaan)
Tähtäimet kohti rintaa (rintaa)
Lataa (lataa)
Käsi vakaa (vakaa)
Päästä avaruutes vapaaks (vapaaks)

("Luoti," Khid x RPK 2014b)

The song can thus be interpreted to encourage killing, but not in the conventional sense of taking someone's or one's own life. In the next section, I read this through the idea of death as freedom from constrictions and from hip hop's authenticity ideology.

5.3.3 Death as freedom

Throughout most of the video, Khid's head is seen only partially, reducing him to a talking head reminiscent of an oracle or a prophet (a recurring trope in rap, see Dube 2015). In fact, we don't see any longshots, which enhances a feeling of intimacy. This occurs particularly when Khid first boasts having left his tag to the realm of death, using the word "Tuonela" which is familiar from the Finnish national mythology and the national epic Kalevala: "I already went to the other side and left tags in the underworld" ("mä kävin jo toisel puolella ja heitin tägit Tuonelaan"). Grace (2002: 34) notes that North and death are often close associates, and here Khid constructs Finnishness and perhaps also northenness with a reference to death. Also, according to Utley (2012: 4) the stereotypical gangsta figure's play with violence and death has always had an otherworldly connection in hip hop. Khid's boasting with the reference to the underworld can be seen to establish his own authenticity as free from hip hop hypermasculinity and fakeness, as he seemingly claims he has already killed his rap ego. In other words, Khid asserts that he already knows what death is like and thus is not afraid of it – quite the contrary, as he declares in the refrain that death is the ultimate freedom: "set your space free." In the video, Khid draws a line across his throat with his finger while rapping (at 00:40), suggesting killing. Slightly later (at 00:54), he hits his palm with his fist, which is another clearly violent gesture. He thus communicates that he is not afraid of "dying" as there is no longer any rap ego in him to get rid of; instead he is free as a bird, or in this case specifically a peafowl.

The idea of liberation through the death of the ego and Khid wanting to spread this idea can also be read from his line "when peafowls fly" ("kun riikinkukot lentää") in

the second verse. In Hindu mythology, peafowl is the mount of the god of war, Kartikeya, and the bird symbolizes the destruction of the ego. Kartikeya uses many different weapons to destroy human ills; Khid's storytelling of a bullet appears like a suitable parallel. In my interview, Khid explained that he was not aware of this connotation in Hinduism and that the peafowl is a reference to a song by Finnish rapper Jodarok ("Anna riikinkukon lentää," "Let the peafowl fly," Jodarok 2011), where peafowl refers to excessive boasting and lying (Khid i2015). Khid can thus be interpreted to kill the rapper's ego, the excessive boasting, and sets their mind and creativity free. During these lines, we see Khid biting into an apple, while a white line covers his eyes and partially his left ear, then spitting it out. Apple has been used to symbolize knowledge in religious contexts, and it can perhaps be seen to suggest that Khid "spits knowledge," as the rap parlance goes, about how to get rid of hypermasculinity.

Khid mentioned in passing that some themes in his songs were influenced by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (Khid i2015). Thus, my reading here is also influenced by the notion of death drive theorized by Freud (2011 [1920]). Freud (2011 [1920]: 75–76) defines a drive as an "urge inherent in living organic matter for the restoration of an earlier state," and thus death drive as the first drive, signaling that "*the goal of all life is death* [...]." (2011 [1920]: 77; emphasis in original). According to Freud (2011 [1920]: 81), the ego urges us towards death; this aggressive death drive is opposed to Eros, the life-sustaining and sexual force, yet these two drives are also intertwined. According to feminist psychoanalytical readings, men's hypermasculine aggression and attempt to dominate (women) is rooted in their need to repress femininity because of their envy and fear of women[94]; femininity reminds men that they are unable to identify with their "bad" mother's power to reproduce as well as take away life, the feeling of detachment and emptiness thus sometimes resulting in violence or other form of aggression (Minsky 1998: 36, 85, 92, 164, 172–173).

Applying this idea to "Luoti," the rap ego with its obsession with hypermasculinity will eventually cause its own demise because of its toxicity. The framework of hypermasculinity given by Khid and the song lyrics makes it possible to read the gun sounds and bullets as symbolizing phallus and male obsession with power (over women) causing pain. Reading "Luoti" from this perspective, the song becomes a call for "realness" instead of machismo and toxic masculinity of egocentric rap. Further, in his lyrics Khid requests those with a feeling of "loss" and "need for realness" to raise their hands, underscoring that there is nothing authentic or real about such macho posing. In the beginning of the

[94] Pinn (1999: 11) also notes that "[g]angsta rappers' barbarism and hostility toward women masks fear which is centered on the fact that women threaten the survival of men."

song, he also calls for the suburban dwellers who feel like losers, and later in that verse people who feel pain, to raise their hands up in the air, seemingly wanting to end their suffering. Those raising their hands will be released from the prison of hip hop's hypermasculinity, as Khid's example as the non-believer helps them to terminate "illusions meant to hold humans in place" (cf. Pinn 2015b: 133). Like other rappers before him (cf. Pinn 2015b: 133–134), Khid pushes the boundaries of authority and what is real.

Religious studies scholar Margarita Simon Guillory (2015: 19) in her analysis of Erykah Badu's "Window Seat" music video frames the fact of her nakedness and subsequent killing by a gun shot as follows:

> [T]his assassination of the physical body ironically frees her from the debilitating shackles of the collective body. The bullet sets free a personal self, one that is based on her own individual uniqueness. […] It is this very act of walking away that she implicitly states how she is finally liberated to embrace and "love herself"[…].

Borrowing Guillory's idea, the "Luoti" song's key message can be interpreted to be an encouragement to release oneself from the (rap) ego, which is done by killing it with a bullet. The song lyrics tell a story of Khid as already having killed his ego, suggested by references to suicide such as jumping from a balcony, thus his mind is free. He also invites others who feel disappointed with their lives to join him in "real" life and to find individuality instead of following norms. It slowly becomes clear that he does not refer to physically killing anyone, but removing detrimental forms of hypermasculinity. Additionally for example philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (quoted in Freud 2011 [1920]: 193) sees mortality and death as the essence of individuality, and as the condition for existing as more than mere undefined being. This view is also the one Khid puts forward in "Luoti" according to my reading: by killing the hip hop tropes oppressing rappers, individuality and freedom of expression is achieved. Khid in fact talks about death or disappearing in his lyrics on several occasions, for example in the song "Ikkuna" ("Window," Khid 2016a), he raps "I respond to death by nodding my head" ("mä vastaan kuolemalle nyökkäämällä").[95] This supports my reading of "Luoti" as embracing death as something positive, enhancing "authentic" hip hop identities and creativity.

[95] In virtually all of Khid's songs that have a music video, one of the central themes is death, disappearance, or escapism: see for example "Maa jota ei ole" ("Land which does not exist," Khid 2016b), "Zelda" (Khid 2015b), and "Ikkuna" ("Window," Khid 2016c). Rinta-Pollari (2018) discusses the idea of non-belonging and the "Maa jota ei ole" song in her bachelor's thesis.

In "Luoti," Khid appears to release rappers from the constrictions of rap conventions and hip hop's authenticity ideology as he encourages killing these ideas with bullets. In the audiovisual representation offered by "Luoti," death equals freedom from such constrictions. The successful killing sets the mind free ("päästä avaruutes vapaaks," "set your space free"), the song using space as a metaphor for the now seemingly limitless mind. Or as philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer states, "dying should be considered the actual purpose of life" (quoted in Freud 2011 [1920]: 149; cf. Välimäki 2015: 170 on Heidegger), as only then can the rapper be truly free according to Khid. In the lyrics, Khid celebrates that "smile begins to show a hue of realness" ("hymyssä alkaa näkyy häivähdys aitoa"); by killing the rap ego, Khid has successfully found the "real" person. This is also one of the many instances in the video where we see the skull image (at 02:12, see also **Figure 18**), thus visually confirming that the idea is to die.

Figure 16. "Luoti" (Khid x RPK 2014b): Khid in prism suggesting an altered state of mind (02:01).

From the second verse onwards, geometrical mandala-like shapes made by the bullets and the distorting prism views are visually seducing the viewer but also complicate our vision and navigates us towards a transcendent state (see **Figures 16–18**). This is also a very common theme in altered states: according to Till (2010: 35), due to the usage of hallucinogenic drugs – the impact of which is often associated with spiritual transcendence – it is common to "experience bright geometric patterns, floating or flying, passage through a tunnel, transformations into one thing or another […] and enhanced vivid sight." It appears that by this second verse, we have already reached the "other side" mentioned in the first verse, and are now in an altered state

of mind; after "letting go," as Khid boasts having himself done, the rap ego dies and a person is free of suffering. We see a skull appear as a quick flash several times during the video, placed in a way so that it appears as Khid's or RPK's (see Figure 18). The image can be interpreted to suggest that the rappers are "dead," their minds detached and free from the rap ego.

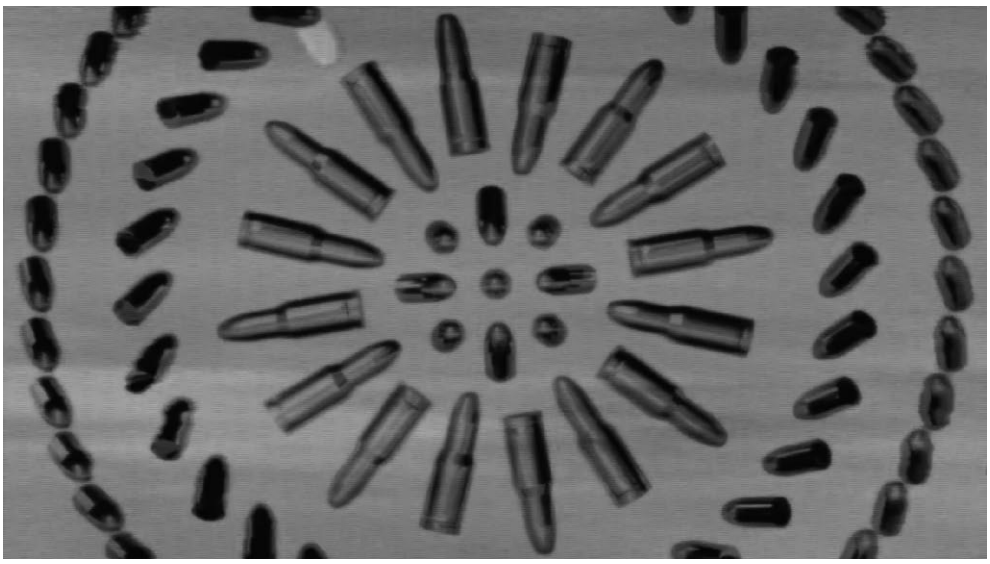

Figure 17. "Luoti" (Khid x RPK 2014b): Bullet animation symbolizing hypermasculinity (00:41).

Figure 18. "Luoti" (Khid x RPK 2014b): Skull referencing the death of the rap ego (01:38).

Interestingly, as Khid himself admitted (Khid i2015; Khid p2017), the *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) album contains spiritual themes and influences despite his atheistic worldview. Like Schopenhauer in his work, despite being a resolute atheist, also Khid resorts to using religious ideas and terminology like soul (discussed in 4.1.3) also in "Luoti." In this framework, "Luoti" offers an interesting counterpoint in this study and perhaps can be seen to exhibit the pick-and-mix character of contemporary worldviews: religions and spirituality serve as cultural resources for artistic expression as well as for personal views. Namely, on several songs on the *Ei* album, Khid refers to nothingness and people with no selves, suggesting mental if not spiritual growth. On the *Ei* album's final song "Ulos" ("Out"), Khid further explains having found "the light" and heard the "truth," and now there is "nothing" and "no one." Such rhetoric and ideas are typical in New Age spirituality, and some neo-versions of Hinduism's non-dualist Advaita Vedanta as well as Mahayana Buddhism as discussed earlier in this study.

While in various religions, such as Christianity or Buddhism, death can be seen as a way of rejoining God or the infinite, considering the idea of death as liberation can also be developed from an atheist point of view and hence for atheists or nonbelievers, death can equally function as a life-structuring principle, a necessary condition and completion of life (Burley 2012: 538). More importantly for the present reading, where death is a release, religious studies scholar Mikel Burley (Burley 2012: 538) notes that "[...] death could be conceived as a gift [...] as a welcome release from prolonged suffering – an escape from tragedy" (Burley 2012: 543). Additionally, because "death [...] is one of the conditions of having a recognizably human life at all" (Burley 2012: 538), immortality might even "rob life of any purpose [...] for the atheist and the believer in God alike" (Burley 2012: 544). It appears that it is the abovementioned sense in which Khid welcomes death in "Luoti," as he invites us to let go of hip hop's hypermasculine and restrictive norms; indeed, "death [...][is] recognized as life" (Pinn 2015b: 133).

Whereas the song began with gun cocking and loading sounds, at the very end during the outro, the shells of the bullets are falling down and we hear a final big bang of a gunshot; the deed has been done. The drums are now gone, and only layered synthesizers and video game effects remain. The word "vapaaks," which can be translated as "free" or "liberated," echoes at the end, which leads us to believe that someone has been "killed," released of their ego and obsessive hypermasculinity. First RPK, then Khid, appear on the screen, and turn their back on us as if to leave the crime scene, while a ping-pong style reverberated ticking starts quietly, then becomes more prominent and finishes the song. If we take this reading even further and consider the idea that violence is connected with pain, Khid's song can be interpreted as a feminist attempt at destroying (killing) toxic masculinity and thus releasing men trapped in its confines, and its pain producing logic. It seems

evident that discourses in hip hop are much more complex and discursively creative than simple words can imply; taking the song's ideas about guns and bullets at face value would have resulted in a completely different analysis.

5.3.4 Hip hop atheism

In conclusion, with the help of audiovisual cues, the video restages what is emblematic of dark, hypermasculine gangsta authenticity; the discourse about guns and violence is exploited to deliver the idea that "true" authenticity can be achieved via killing the rap ego. This idea is applied here as visually highly aestheticized and without guns, thus distanced from actual violence and gangsters, yet closely resembling the kind of play with aggressive beats and topics familiar from gangsta rap (see Kelley 1996: 121). The cliché of masculine gangsta rappers is of course one part of hip hop's authenticity discourses (McLeod 1999; Jeffries 2011) and tied historically to the subgenre of "reality rap" where lived ghetto realities are translated into rap songs about gangsters (Kelley 1996), but this is rather ill-fitted to the Finnish context. Hence, Khid utilizes various tropes pertaining to Finnish culture and mythology to localize his message. Considering Khid's idea behind the song, the metaphorical use of the guns and bullets in the video and song functions as a critique of misogynistic and violent hypermasculinity. In this way, the video and the song's soundscape simultaneously connect with and build a distance to what is typically considered as mainstream rap as they apply discursive ideas of authenticity typically attached to US gangsta rap and its highly masculine, even aggressive world. As musicologist Lauron Kehrer (2017: 22) notes,

> [i]dentities that fall outside of the configuration of black, heterosexual, masculine male are always defined and redefined against that contextual norm. In the process of identifying in relation to and/or against this hip-hop norm, artists employ strategies that allow them to position themselves as authentic hip-hop artists while also articulating their own individual subjectivity.

The video and song can be read as an atheistic standpoint towards hip hop tropes and conventions, a declaration of nonbelief and an act of renouncing hip hop standards in favor of individual expression. This also appears to be the key idea behind the last lines of the second verse, "hands up if you're in need of reality" ("kädet ylös jos on todellisuuden tarve"): the reality Khid is offering is a release from toxic hip hop masculine ideology through his bullets, and a "real" and sincere hip hop expression in its place. Through the lyrics, Khid is inviting particularly men ("jäbät," "dudes"; "pahat pojat," "bad boys") to stop believing in the creed of hypermasculinity as the yard stick for hip hop authenticity. If this role of hypermasculinity as a part of hip

hop authenticity is destroyed like Khid aims to do, then hypermasculinity can no longer function as a sign of authenticity. It, however, necessitates atheism from the belief that only macho rappers are "real" rappers. As Anttonen (2017a: 60) observes, following genre conventions too tightly often results in the artist being judged as "generic and imitative," yet Anttonen (2017b: 278) also notes that refusing to follow genre rules or expectations can equally be perceived as inauthentic. While Khid criticizes these generic macho rappers, his attempt appears to be to destroy the genre convention of hypermasculinity-as-authenticity by establishing an atheistic stance so as not to appear inauthentic himself. Indeed, this might be seen as analogous to how new atheists paint a picture of religion as detrimental and irrational, and thus advocate for its replacement (cf. Taira 2015). However, new atheists have often expressed criticism or even hostility towards feminist ideas (Taira 2015: 159; LeDrew 2016: 197–211), and in this sense, Khid's artist persona clearly differs; indeed, on closer inspection, he appears closer to a humanist advocating for a more socially progressive form of rap (cf. Pinn 2003).

The gangsta discourse is reconstructed in the video but has a distinctly different function from most of its US counterparts where the discourse is commonly used to construct tough, violent, hypermasculine, and often black identities. Irony, parody and reversals of original meaning are a quintessential part of contemporary popular culture (Hatch 2015 [2002]: 264), and performances are fantasy, play, and entertainment (Schechner 1988: xiv). Also in American gangsta rap, there is humor, exaggeration and tongue-in-cheek rhetorics, and similarly, it would be a mistake to take Finnish rappers' gangsta aesthetics at face value; instead, the parody may be a way for them to distance themselves as (white) rappers from US rap and an attempt to avoid too obvious cultural appropriation (cf. Hilamaa & Varjus 2004). Based on my observations above, Khid and RPK reconstruct and play with the gangster habitus and swagger but incorporate this aesthetic to an atheistic worldview. Also, taking my atheistic reading of "Luoti" and comparing it to the US gangstas' spiritual worldview which has been mainly influenced by Christianity (Utley 2012) and various forms of Islam, including Five Percent Nation, they show even further differences. A connecting point, however, can be seen in how Khid attempts to shake normative hip hop ideologies, bearing similarities to how gangsta rappers have shaken larger societal and cultural structures, norms, and ideas (Rose 1994; Forman 2002; Utley 2012; cf. Miller 2013: 86–87).

It should be noted that masculine gangster aesthetics are just one aspect of the image and artist persona of the artists in this study, and certainly not the most dominant feature in their music in general. While acknowledging that Khid's localized adaptation of the gangsta pose is meant to function as a critique, at the same time, we should be mindful of how "white appropriation of nonwhite cultural products speaks to the invisibility of white racial identity" (Jeffries (2012: 7). Khid

is able to use such tropes without being labelled a thug, something which rappers of color more easily face due to cultural stereotypes, because of his whiteness and the privilege that comes with it, much like Euro Crack is able to perform as drug dealers in their music without being labelled as dealers in real life. Even if the artists' goal is to criticize some white rappers' appropriation of the black masculine hip hop habitus, we may ask whether Khid or Euro Crack are successful in crafting this critique or whether they are also participating in a form of cultural appropriation which relies on hip hop's racist stereotypes of black men as violent gangsters.

This chapter has provided three close readings of the artists' music videos. Whereas Euro Crack and Khid attempted to deconstruct masculine tropes about drug dealers and gangsters shooting bullets with their spiritual and critical atheist ideas, Ameeba's video took us to the North, serving ideas about transmigration and enlightenment through reconnecting with nature. All three videos also appear to create new, more complex masculinities which reject hypermasculine ideals and instead aim to explore emotions (Ameeba) and religious ideas (Euro Crack, Ameeba) and alternatives for mainstream rap more generally (Ameeba, Euro Crack, Khid).

6 Underground rap artists and demands for authenticity

This chapter discusses how Finnish underground rappers attempt to balance between music industry demands, audience expectations, and their own artistic vision and aims, and how the four artists construct "underground" rap as an alternative form of music. The main focus is on how these themes together with the discourse on authenticity are constructed by the artists in interviews and through song lyrics.

Below in subchapter 6.1, these issues are discussed in connection to the artists' views on artistic integrity (section 6.1.1), audience (section 6.1.2), and the music industry (section 6.1.3). Subchapter 6.2 discusses the artists' views on the so-called ideology of authenticity (section 6.2.1) and "fake" authenticity, how age and experience as a rapper is linked to authenticity (section 6.2.2), and finally, overcoming the ideological demands of authenticity (section 6.2.3).

6.1 Artistic integrity and underground attitudes

This subchapter analyzes how the rappers understand their status as underground artists in terms of their own music making and in terms of their attitude towards their audience and (mainstream) music industry. As stated already before, underground is a complicated and multifaceted notion, yet it often appears simple when contrasted discursively with the mainstream. In addition to the media, for example, the audience to a large extent defines the artist's status in the music business, whether the artist is considered "mainstream" or "underground," pop rap or conscious rap, for instance. Although the audience holds significant power in determining such categories, artists may even exhibit contempt towards the audience and its incompetence in understanding or evaluating them and their music (Frith 1996: 53). Frith (1996: 53) further notes that for the audience and the musicians, "the bases of musical appreciation are also different, a necessary result of the power relation involved." Contempt was not evident in how the four rappers in this study spoke about their audience; however, when they discussed the (pop) music industry, attitudes of suspicion and even perceived irrelevance of industry rules rose to the surface as the artists stressed the autonomous and creative nature of their music making (cf.

authenticity as negation in Anttonen 2017a: 35). Their critique was more focused on music production than consumption. Although the theme of autonomy is visible in almost all answers given by the artists, in the first section (6.1.1) of this subchapter autonomy is discussed particularly in connection with monetary compensation.

6.1.1 "I really don't care at all what anyone thinks": autonomy and money

The idea of artistic independence is a common trait of the authenticity discourse, as mentioned in the theoretical part of this study (3.2.1). Commercialism in the sense of an artist being motivated by money is typically seen as "selling out" or as "a betrayal of one's experience" (Jeffries 2011: 134). Making and releasing music then becomes an ethical issue where values regarding art and success are at stake; a successful major label artist risks being labelled a sell out who sacrificed artistic vision for financial rewards, whereas independent artists, who are perceived to make music without compromises, do not necessarily even make ends meet. The discourse around money is thus a crucial part of the discussion around authenticity and autonomy. Overall, these arguments reflect an old notion of "high art" existing autonomously for "artistic reasons" and low art for commercial or other ends (Frith 1996: 18).

Particularly Julma Henri highlighted the idea of artistic independence on several occasions:

> JULMA HENRI: […] I've come to the conclusion that this music well. I want to do it without any pressure. Like I don't have to get a penny for it. [...] [T]hat's why I don't, in principle, want to live off of it. If it were the only thing then I'd depend on pleasing others. Then the music itself will suffer [...].
> INKA: Yeah I always find that interesting to which extent artists then think about whether this will sell and what the audience thinks. What the fans think.
> JULMA HENRI: I really don't care at all [laughs]--
> INKA: [laughs]
> JULMA HENRI: --what anyone thinks. For real I don't care, I couldn't care less. [inaudible] [T]he album is what it is [...] or the music. I think it's actually a good thing that I don't have to think about stuff like that because then you get to do what you want in peace.

> *JULMA HENRI: […][M]ä oon todennu sen tän musiikin niin. Mä haluan tehä sen silleen paineettomasti. Että mun ei tarvii saaha siitä penniäkään rahhaa. […] [E]t sen takia mä en periaatteessa haluais ellää siitä. Jos se ois ainoa juttu*

niin sitte mä oisin riippuvainen siitä muitten miellyttämisestä. Sitte se alkaa kärsiä se ite musiikki […].
INKA: Joo toi on mun mielestä aina mielenkiintonen juttu että miten paljon artistit tavallaan miettii just sitten sitä että no tuleeko tää myymään ja mitä yleisö ajattelee. Mitä fanit ajattelee.
JULMA HENRI: Mua ei kyllä kiinnosta yhtään-- [nauraa]
INKA: [nauraa]
JULMA HENRI: --mitä kukaan ajattelee. Oikeesti ei mua kiinnosta, mulle aivan sama. [epäselvää] [L]evy on semmonen ku se on […] tai se musiikki. Mun mielestä se on hyväki juttu että ei mun tarvi miettii semmosia juttuja ku sillo saa rauhassa tehä sitä mitä haluaa.

(Julma Henri i2015)

Above, Julma Henri states that in addition to disregarding other people's opinions, his financial goals regarding music making are secondary to his artistic independence, ambitions, and getting to do what he wants. The pleasure should be in the music making itself, not caring too much about what other people think. He constructed similar ideas also in another interview (Euro Crack i2015). Julma Henri highlighted that he has his own record label, Mörssi Records, through which he releases music, and that he owns the master copies of all his records (Julma Henri i2015), further supporting this image of autonomy. Additionally, when I asked him about his mask wearing (Julma Henri i2015; Julma Henri i2017), he expressed resentment towards recognition and fame, and suggested that as an artist, he expresses alternative societal and political views (with Leftist and even anarchistic overtones) which might result in problems in his daily life were he to reveal his true identity. Julma Henri has also critiqued capitalist profit seeking in his songs (see for example "Punainen," "Red," Julma Henri 2011). By remaining anonymous in this way, Julma Henri not only is able to make music "in peace," as he states above, but he also constructs underground credibility and signals resistance towards the pop industry's obsession with celebrities (cf. Hansen 2017: 92). Hess (2005b: 298) argues that rap artists obscure their identities in order to separate their different performed characters from the commercial side of the music, which also reflects rappers' distrust for the music industry.

Julma Henri equates financial goals with musical compromises; if the primary aim is to earn a living with music, the artist will then have to please the audience, which will necessarily cause the art to suffer and perhaps also affect the pleasure of music making (cf. Strachan 2007: 256). Continuing from this theme later in another interview, Julma Henri asserted that anyone attempting to dictate to him how to make music is something he finds extremely annoying (Euro Crack i2015). He

characterized this as a feeling he has "always" had about music making (Euro Crack i2015), thus constructing a seemingly consistent image of himself as an autonomous artist. In the above extract, he seems to express a need to avoid the "regular pressure to come up with what is going to be financially successful" (Negus 1995: 331) related to the music business, as it interferes with his creative process. His repetitive use of "then" ("sitte") constructs a causal image of how (his) music will deteriorate if money making becomes too closely attached to it. Several studies dealing with similar themes have outlined that this idea of commercial success as inauthenticity is centrally attached to underground music cultures (Thornton 1995). For example Jeffries (2011: 147) notes that inauthentic and thus "bad" hip hop is often equated with blatant commercialism and consequently, the quality of the art of a hip hop performer motivated by money or success is considered poor. Yet, this common subcultural idea where commercial success *automatically* signals inferior artistic quality (e.g. Demers 2010: 147) does not directly come across here as Julma Henri describes music making pressures and his personal decision to avoid them through his values guiding the music making process. If his values stay intact and his motivation derives from the will to make art and not from money, the success will be morally sound. In fact, all four artists in my study considered that mainstream success would not bother them provided that they can continue making music according to their own standards. They assert that they do not attempt to target niche audiences or remain underground on purpose.

Julma Henri's suggestion that he does not need to be compensated for music making also supports this argument about his artistic process as independent and thus authentic. Julma Henri and I both laugh at the notion that he as a performing and recording artist does not care *at all* what his listeners think about his music, as this makes releasing music seem futile or even absurd. Creativity and commercialism are often pitted against each other in an effort to further ideas about a seemingly mystical creative process and to obscure the role of capitalism in music making (Strachan 2007: 248; cf. Negus 1995). As cultural studies scholar Jon Stratton (1982: 272) succinctly puts, the pressure causes artists to see themselves "in opposition to the industry as a commercial enterprise." According to Stratton (1982: 272), this differentiation is a protective mechanism shielding the artist from the pressure to produce marketable products and thus allows more freedom in creative music making.

I argue that Julma Henri projects the idea of "art for art's sake" by claiming that he ignores other people's opinions; he is an independent non-conforming artist, which is exacerbated above with words such as "at all" ("yhtään") and "for real" ("oikeesti"). This reflects a romantic-modernist idea where art is appreciated because it has successfully retained its autonomy, resisting outside conditions and understandings of its worth (cf. Demers 2010: 139). Art for art's sake was an idea that came across to some extent also when I interviewed the other three artists. Speers

(2014: 183) found similar attitudes among UK hip hop artists who construct authenticity by highlighting that their "love for hip hop" and dedication to their art outweighs money. Hip hop studies scholar and sociologist Anna Oravcová (2013: 131–132) states that underground Czech rappers dedicated to practicing hip hop "from the heart" sometimes equate financial success with selling out. Although the idea of selling out was not visible in Julma Henri's assertions, these comparative examples suggest that autonomous practice is a cross-cultural hip hop underground ideal: artistic independence and ideas should not be corrupted by mainstream audiences or music industry demands. Thus, an artist who constructs an image of artistic accomplishment through hard work while portraying their music as "free" from commercial pressures and its associated values of (monetary) success is often considered to build underground rap credibility and to "keep it real." This also resonates with Frith's (1996: 69) analysis of the common discourse around "good" music, which is "original" and "autonomous," and "bad" music which is produced for the market and "standardized." Yet, Frith (1996: 58) also notes that originality can become a burden if reduced to a marketing gimmick.

On the surface level, this tempts parallel drawing also between the US hip hop underground authenticity discourse, where resisting mainstream trends and commercialism has been central (e.g. McLeod 1999); however, the context within which Julma Henri and the other Finnish artists operate, albeit similar to other countries in the sense that they are underground artists within the now very mainstream genre of Finnish rap, is different in racial terms. Unlike in the US, where underground rap has attempted to preserve its countercultural and predominantly non-white identity in the face of white-dominated labels and pop culture (see e.g. McLeod 1999), in Finland the whole genre is dominated by white males, a group which the four artists in this study pertain to. In this sense, Finnish rap authenticity and the discourse around it is substantially different from the US discourse (see also Westinen & Rantakallio 2019; Westinen 2016). The white Finnish male artists' suspicion towards mainstream music industry appears to be more related to the potential concession of their musical style, critical and often countercultural lyrical content, and artistic independence than their racial or other minority status. The power relations, in this case, are more related to the limitations posed by mainstream music industry. The artists' views on these limitations are discussed further below in section 6.1.3.

Besides Julma Henri, also RPK reflected on the financial aspect of music making in terms of aesthetic concession and compromise:

> RPK: But [...] I won't start to change the format just to please people. I'm not saying it wouldn't be financially sensible but I just haven't been able to do it. I'm not dissing those [...] who do that. [...] In certain situations I would've been pretty happy if I had been able to make some radical policies or concessions [...].

> But money was never that important to me in the end. Originally when we started to make [music] there's was no sign of money, like you couldn't even imagine. If you made a record and you broke even that was perfect.
>
> *RPK: Mut […] mä en rupee muuttamaan formaattii sen takii et mä rupeisin miellyttämään. Sitä mä en sano etteikö se ois kannattavaa mut mä en oo vaan pystyny siihen. Emmä dissaa niit […] jotka niin tekee. […] Joissain tilanteissa mä oisin ihan tyytyväinen et jos ois pystyny tekee jotain radikaalei linjanvetoi tai myönnytyksii […] Mut raha ei koskaan ollu mulle lopult niin tärkee. Alun perin ku lähettiin tekee [musiikkia] ni rahast ei ollu tietookaan, et ei voinu kuvitellakaan. Jos teki levyn ja sai siit omat ni se oli täydellistä.*
>
> (RPK i2015)

Like Julma Henri, RPK states that he is not willing to alter his music to please the audience despite it being financially sensible. He admits, however, that being more willing to compromise would have perhaps been smart career wise or money wise, thus he does not wish to speak ill of those who have adapted their music to mainstream music industry trends. Nonetheless, RPK asserts that he is not prepared to compromise aesthetically, and that this also shows in his relationship with money: when he began making music, there was "no sign of money" whatsoever, and also later money has not played such a significant role in his music career. In this way, RPK projects an image of personal commitment towards music making, which overrides financial gains. Like Julma Henri, RPK constructs an image of himself as a consistent artist who prioritizes music and artistic vision, but his response is more nuanced. He has also stressed that music making is his living (see 6.1.3), thus money *does* hold value for him. Naturally, selling and promoting music are key practices for smaller actors in the music business, too, despite their different status compared to major actors (cf. Strachan 2007: 247).

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the audience holds a significant role in defining the status of artists. In the next section, I discuss how the artists describe their relationship with their audience in terms of music making and the creative process.

6.1.2 Artist views on audience opinions

In the consumerist capitalist society, "[t]he audience has emerged in the twentieth century as a social category that rivals and, in some instances, surpasses the power of the categories of class and mass." (Marshall 2001: 61.) Yet, relatively little has been written about what artists who make music think about their audience (see

however e.g. Tsioulakis & Hytönen-Ng eds. 2016; Westinen 2014; Hytönen 2010), and how artists characterize their relationship with their audience more broadly. During my study, I asked the artists if they actively seek information about how their listeners have reacted to their music. Julma Henri asserts below that he rarely pays attention to audience reactions:

> INKA: Do you ever go read online what people comment like under a music video or [your] Facebook wall or?
> JULMA HENRI: Well no I don't actively, there are shitloads of those videos and comments and. I think it's not even healthy. If you have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who share their opinions and then their thoughts go through your head. I feel that will then mess with your head. The most important thing is just that you yourself know what you think about that thing and flow with that. Otherwise you're like a weathercock steered by others. Then you can just ask for their order like "what would you like?"
>
> *INKA: Käyksä ikinä netissä lukee mitään mitä jengi kommentoi vaik johonki musavideoon tai Facebook-seinälle tai?*
> *JULMA HENRI: No en mä kyllä aktiivisesti, niitä on niin helevetisti niitä videoita ja kommentteja ja. Mun mielest se ei oo ees terveellistä. Jos sul on satoja ja satoja ja satoja ihmisiä jotka kertoo niitten mielipiteitä ja sitten niitten ajatukset menee sun pään läpi. Must tuntuu että siitä joutuu ihan pyörälle päästään sitte. Tärkeintä on vaan että sä itte tiiät mitä mieltä sä oot siitä jutusta ja mennä sillä. Muuten sitä on tuuliviiri muitten ohjattavana siinä. Et sitte voi pistää tilauksen auki että "minkälaista haluaisitte?"*
>
> (Julma Henri i2015)

Here, Julma Henri suggests that as an artist, he might compromise his integrity and personal artistic vision if he allowed his listeners' and followers' comments to influence his music making decisions. In the age of social media, the amount of comments artists receive is often substantial, rendering it impossible to take into consideration, let alone fulfill, the requests of each audience member. Given the facility of commenting and posting in social media, it is possible to assume that not all commentators are necessarily even part of Julma Henri's listening audience or familiar with Julma Henri's music in general. According to Julma Henri, aiming to fulfill other people's expectations of his music would also be antithetical to the idea of autonomy and personal authenticity: it is more important to know your own preferences as an artist and follow your personal ideas. Kembrew McLeod (1999: 140) remarks that individualism is central for underground rap's authenticity claims

and oppositionality towards "mass" music industries and tastes. In connection to this, McLeod (1999: 140) quotes the well-known West Coast rapper MC Eiht who asserts that potential large sales numbers are not due to a change of format (cf. RPK below in this section) but are attributable to the artists themselves.

I asked RPK to comment on Julma Henri's statements about not caring about what others think. Although Julma Henri seemingly denies his interest towards the audience, and has apparently repeated this idea to RPK as well, RPK doubted this is truly Julma Henri's stance on the issue (RPK i2015). We can perhaps assume that Julma Henri was referring more to ignoring the masses than his own fans and underground rap listeners who support his music making by buying or streaming his releases. By considering the variety of different audiences, we can also discern how underground artists construct their status in the music industry, as Westinen (2014) also discusses in her study.

RPK discussed this issue of artist-audience-industry relations from the point of creative pressure as well as aesthetics:

> RPK: [...] It does have an influence, at least on my doing that [other people's] opinion has an influence but I myself want to think. Especially now with this solo album I am trying to make an album where I certainly don't let it influence me like I don't think about it. And in principle the project [Ei-album] with [Khid] and me was kind of like that. I'm not saying that KCMD [rap group] or Huume [album] was about considering the audience but it, at least Huume was from my point of view made perhaps. It wasn't made for my old listeners instead it was for the new ones thus it was made with a certain sound in mind, what's the kind of area they know in some way and how you can slightly go beyond that but not too much. Not letting it get too weird for example. It's easy for me to get too weird. [...] But in my opinion it's good, it's a kind of compressor that makes you try harder, that you slightly feel that audience pressure on your neck. Or if you don't feel it then you imagine how will this then work out. And that tension also a bit [indistinct] that you have something ready and then you release it, there's always that expectation.
>
> *RPK: […] Kyl se vaikuttaa, ainaki mun tekemiseen vaikuttaa [muiden] mielipide mutta mä ite haluun kelaa. Varsinki nyt täs soololevyssä mä yritän tehä semmost levyy et mä en todellakaa anna sen vaikuttaa et mä en kelaa sitä. Ja periaattees toi [Khidin] ja mun projekti [Ei-levy] oli vähän semmonen. Emmä sano et KCMD:s tai Huumeessa mietitään sitä yleisöö mut se ainaki Huume on omalt kantilt tehty ehkä. Se ei oo tehty mun vanhoille kuuntelijoille vaan uusille ni on tehty se mielessä mikä on semmone saundi, mikä on semmone alue minkä ne jollain taval tuntee ja miten sitä voi vähän rikkoo mut ei liikaa. Että ei mee liian*

> *vaikka häröks. Mun on tosi helppo mennä liian häröks. […] Mut mun mielest se on ihan hyvä, se on semmone puserrin joka saa sut yrittämään paremmin, et sä tunnet vähän sen yleisön paineen sun niskassa. Tai vaikket tunne ni sä kuvittelet, mitenköhän tää homma natsaa nyt sitte. Ja se jännityski vähän [epäselvää] et sul on joku valmis ja sit sä laitat sen pihoille, siin on aina se odotus.*
>
> (RPK i2015)

This is a rather nuanced answer, underscoring that the musical project in many ways determines to which extent the artist takes the audience into consideration. Different projects also have different audiences. Indeed, it is crucial to pay attention to such differentiations and be careful not to generalize attitudes too hastily. According to RPK, the ideal situation seems to be that the audience aids in the creative process without compromising artistic integrity or vision. Yet, RPK also acknowledges that audience expectations can provide a necessary creative pressure for an artist which results in an increased effort in music making (and potentially better music?), and that he does in fact reflect on the audience's listening habits, which is common for people who create music (e.g. Hiltunen 2016: 24–25), perhaps even avoiding making music that is "too weird."

During the interview, RPK mentioned "weird" music particularly in the context of Bassoradio's Alas and Alas Ambient programs, which he hosted at the time and which featured a large variety of electronic music genres, sound art, and ambient, respectively. According to him, artists reflect on how their music will be received and even wait to hear these reactions. Thus, although the audience should not affect the music, audience members consume the music and their expectations are something the artist is, in the end, interested in when releasing music. RPK appears to be well aware of the distinction between the ideal and reality, the independent creative artist and the artist considering the audience's musical knowledge and preferences. Artists learn to address and please their audiences in various ways, even with "tricks" which may sometimes feel like a compromise (Frith 1996: 53). RPK also describes a certain ability to compromise here, but it is the kind of concession he willingly makes, which is different from the kind of compromises he refuses to make, as seen in the next section (6.1.3) of this chapter.

As Frith (1996: 53) suggests, the principals of musical evaluation and appreciation are often very different between an artist and their audience because of their differing positions. For the artist, music is also work with which they attempt to achieve recognition whereas for the audience it is more about pleasure (Frith 1996: 53). RPK argued in my interview that ideally, artists should not concern themselves with audience discussions about their music, as this may compromise their independence by obscuring the boundaries between the artist and the listeners if they

"get too close" (RPK i2015). The audience is clearly separate from the artist, and it should be. Westinen (2014: 269) notes that for artists, the audience should ideally be "'in line' with the 'whole artistic complex'"; I wish to apply this idea by stating that underground artists can construct credibility vis-à-vis their audience by exemplifying a certain level of indifference and thus independence.

Ameeba also admits that he thinks about his audience although he constructs the opposite as the ideal:

> AMEEBA: I have such high standards for myself […]. Perhaps it started going wrong when I started to think about the listeners. Or well I always somehow nowadays think a little about what others will think about it [the music]. But then that's the mine. You shouldn't step on that. An artist should just make [art] and not care about others. And stuff precisely as weird as they want to make.
>
> *AMEEBA: Itellä on kauhiat laatuvaatimukset itelleen […]. Ehkä se on ruvennu menee siinä kohtaa pieleen ku on ruvennu miettiin kuulijoita. Tai aina sitä jotenki nykysin vähän miettii et mitä muut siitä ajattelee. Mut sit se on se miina. Ei sais mennä siihen. Taiteilijan pitäis vaan tehdä eikä välittää muista. Ja just niin häröö kampetta ku haluaa tehdä.*
>
> (Ameeba i2015b)

Out of the four artists, Ameeba appears to reflect on audience expectations perhaps most, or at least more openly, than the others, and admits that feedback influences his thinking and music making. Yet according to him, the musical result should ideally reflect the artists' "real" art and not what they assume the audience desires. Despite music being a product that is sellable, and many artists wanting to "make it," people tend to view music as art which should not succumb to the capitalist market system, but rather, should have a value and uniqueness that separates it from everyday life (Bailey 2014: 138). Hence, the artist should not let other people's thinking "mess with your head," as Julma Henri stated above, only here this same perception is uttered by Ameeba when he uses a mine as a metaphor. In this way, he underlines how easy it is to surrender your independence to your listeners, and thus your music supposedly looses its autonomy and your artistic freedom is compromised.

Interestingly, Ameeba's expression "härö," which I have translated here as "weird," was the same word also RPK used about his music which he thinks is not mainstream audience friendly. Indeed, it seems that both Ameeba and RPK construct an ideal of something complex, original, and aesthetically unfamiliar or difficult to grasp for "average" consumers as a sign that the artist has not compromised their art (cf. Demers 2010: 141; cf. Keightley 2001: 136–137 on modernist authenticity). This

kind of music is, then, the opposite of "popular" when popular is understood as something widely appreciated and liked (Thornton 1995: 164). Demers (2010: 139) states that in electronic music[96] – which both Ameeba and RPK draw heavily from in their style and production – there is a pervasive ideal of experimentalism across subgenres. This ideal of experimentalism, often synonymous with avant-garde, relies on the assumption that the music has a distinct and independent identity, a "high-culture status," and is resistant to consumerism and mass culture (Demers 2010: 139, 141). Demers (2010: 139) also asserts that the experimentalist discourse relies on the assumption that experimental music is "distinct from and superior to a mainstream-culture industry." Despite this seemingly countercultural ideal described above, both Ameeba and RPK have pointed out that making "pop music" is not necessarily equivalent to selling out to them personally nor generally.

Although all four artists can be considered Romantic in their thinking based on their seemingly shared views on retaining artistic integrity and autonomy, Ameeba in particular could be labeled as the Romantic creative artist whose relationship with his audience is close and includes direct communication (cf. Keightley 2001: 135–136). However, the relationship can even get too close for comfort: Ameeba mentioned that it has been a terrible burden for him to receive very personal and often tragic tales from fans as some have written to him saying that his music has helped them to get through dark times. According to Ameeba, this creates pressure for him to continue making similar music as well as fears of potentially failing to fulfill the expectations of these audience members (Ameeba i2015a). Ameeba seemingly takes his fans and their reactions to his music very seriously, as they claim such personal attachment to the music and its effect on their lives.

An artist can feel pressured to deliver more "good music" when receiving appraisals from fans. Fans often have expectations that "good music" is relatable, which relates to Moore's (2002) second person authenticity. Borrowing from Lawrence Grossberg, Allan Moore (2002: 219) states that fans see authenticity as a result of the music's "ability to articulate for its listeners a place of belonging" which then separates it from other cultural forms, especially from "mere entertainment." This characterization seems particularly suitable for underground rap which is often discursively contrasted with mainstream pop rap and its supposedly frivolous content. It also seems suitable when considering Ameeba's music and how he has characterized it as sad and wistful (Ameeba i2015a) and content-wise deeper (Ameeba i2017). Fans as well as rap musicians often expect underground rap to contain not only sonic "rawness" but also uncensored experiences of urban life from a deeply personal perspective (Rose 1994; 2008; Keyes 2002: 122; Jeffries 2011:

[96] This category includes electroacoustic music, electronica (non-institutional music, including dance genres, but also noise and other), and sound art (Demers 2010).

135). In my experience, while this issue is often discussed in US hip hop studies literature, similar appreciation is visible in the Finnish context: Finnish pop rappers are ridiculed as not representing hip hop with their pop/edm style while "real" rappers are appreciated for storytelling abilities and hard-hitting, gloomier beats.

Much like the other artists, Khid says he does not think outsiders' opinions can or should influence his music:

> INKA: […] does it then matter what others think? About it [finished album]?
> KHID: Nah it doesn't matter [...] what others think that's always interesting and that's cool if others like for example the music that I've made but [...] everything that others think well a large part of it in the end reaches me [...] too late [...] 'cause I can't change this anymore. And 'cause I cannot know what others think when I'm making it. So no. I don't think about what others think, or I mean I can't think about or well I can but [...] "it doesn't matter" means that what others think cannot affect my doings. But then [...] of course I as an artist who releases music hope that people would like what I do. But so it can't affect [...] what others think. Or can it? I guess it can't.
> INKA: Well what do you think about when you for example read, or do you read what people write online for instance?
> KHID: I do if I come across it [...] [I]f I've set certain goals and I've reached them, and I think I succeeded in my work. So then it went as it should've and if someone else then thinks that this whole album is a piece of shit and like weird fumbling so there aren't even any tools to debate about whether someone is wrong or right with their opinion. [...] Because is it then even made by me if other people's expectations affect my doings?

> *INKA: […] onks sillä sitten väliä mitä muut ajattelee? Siitä [valmiista levystä]?*
> *KHID: Eihä sil oo välii […] se mitä muut ajattelee nii sehän on aina kiinnostavaa ja se on siistii jos muut vaikka tykkää mun tekemäst musiikist mut […] kaikki mitä muut ajattelee niin valtaosa siitähän lopulta tulee mulle […] tietona liian myöhään […] ku emmä voi tätä enää muuttaa. Sit ku mä en voi tietää mitä muut ajattelee sillon ku mä teen sitä. Ni e. Emmä mieti sitä mitä muut ajattelee tai ehä mä voi miettii tai kylhän mä voin mut […] "sil ei oo välii" tarkottaa sitä et se mitä muut ajattelee ei voi vaikuttaa mun tekemisiin. Mut sit […] totta kai mä artistina joka julkasee musiikkii toivon et jengi tykkäis siitä mitä mä teen. Mut eihän se voi vaikuttaa. […] Et mitä muut ajattelee. Tai voikse? Ei kai se voi.*
> *INKA: No mitä sä kelaat jos sä luet vaikka, tai lueksä mitä jengi kirjottaa vaikka netissä?*

> *KHID: Luen jos tulee vastaan […][J]os mä oon asettanu jotkut tavotteet ja ne on täyttyny, ja mun mielest mä oon onnistunu mun työssä. Niin sehän on sillon menny sen piti ja sit jos joku muu on taas sitä mieltä että tää on iha paska keissi tää koko levy ja et ihme räpellystä niin eihän siin oo mitään työkaluja edes väitellä siitä et onko jompikumpi väärässä tai oikeessa, mielipiteensä kanssa. […] Koska onkse sit edes mun tekemää jos muiden odotukset vaikuttaa mun tekemisiin?*
>
> (Khid i2015)

This extract from Khid's interview is a rather interesting example of hesitation; Khid struggles to articulate that although he does sometimes think about other people's opinions and is interested in them, those opinions should ideally not affect his art and music making process. If other people's expectations affect him, then his music might as well be made by someone else, as the music making no longer fulfills the ideal of independence. "It doesn't matter" is a rather strong way of dismissing the audience, which Khid softens with stating that he hopes for and appreciates positive feedback. He also appears to consider his albums as independent entities (like RPK earlier in this section), and indeed different albums can have different listeners. Even if the audience is familiar with his previously released music, Khid asserts that the audience cannot affect or assess something that has not been released yet. This allows Khid to work on his music in peace. Yet Khid, too, reads audience reactions online although underscoring that his own opinion about his music is not affected by it. This is in line with the discourse on artistic independence and authenticity constructed by the other artists above.

I argue that, by virtue of making music and operating in the popular music capitalist industry (releasing music and selling it), the artists are subject to hegemonic discourses about pop industry, the mainstream, and underground, which manifests when they attempt to explain their position towards their audiences, like Khid above. The rappers uphold certain values and discourses which demand that underground artists remain independent in their music making and pay very little attention to their audience, yet on a personal level they may admit seeking acceptance from listeners and experience pleasure when receiving positive feedback, or frustration upon negative reactions.

One of the key ways artists construct underground identities is by positioning themselves outside the mainstream music industry. In the next section, I analyze how the artists construct the discursive underground-mainstream-continuum, and critique the music the industry.

6.1.3 Artist position in the industry

In his study on micro-labels and music industry, popular music scholar Robert Strachan (2007: 249) observes that micro-label owners perpetuate and construct two tropes in particular which have been a central part of rock music discourse for decades: "[f]irst, there is an assumption that the organizational structures of the recording industry necessitate that creativity suffers; second, that creative people (musicians) signed to major labels suffer." These ideas came across also in how Julma Henri and Ameeba talked about the music industry and their own authenticity. RPK's and Khid's answers were slightly more nuanced in the sense that they did not characterize their relationship with the pop music industry as antagonistically.

Below, RPK explains that "keeping it underground" relates to his will to preserve his artistic autonomy while making music. RPK reflects on his roughly 25-year-spanning career as a musician:

> RPK: [T]wenty-five years I've been making music and the driving force for me has always been that [...] I just don't want to make basic stuff. [...] I make music so much based on vibes like I have to be feeling it that's why [...] it just isn't enough for me anymore or hasn't been for a long time what people mean by that basic stuff, especially if we talk about the Finnish music game. I'm not talking about everyone, in Finland there are a lot of really good [music] makers underground but that big picture of Finnish music, I think it's pretty lame, all that pop stuff. [...][I]'ve never really pushed to go abroad but I make music as though I was somewhere out in the world. Which in the end probably in a certain way shoots me in the foot but what can you do. If you like something then you do that or that's what I've decided. Like I don't do anything other than what I like. Yeah.
> INKA: […][W]ould you say that you have a kind of underground attitude maybe towards music making?
> RPK: Yes yes but I've never said no to that [mainstream], that music should be small scale just because I want to keep it underground. It's maybe something that I want to state out loud. I've had many projects where I personally thought things might have been bigger than they were. And […] there were chances to get there but due to outside circumstances which I don't fully understand, Finnish music game is pretty shitty when you get to that big [game]. I wouldn't mind at all getting bigger shows. In fact [...] in a way that has been everything I've ever strived for in the end. Of course I rap with an underground [style] but that too it's more [...] an attitude, you know. […] It's not a value in and of itself, I don't want to keep shit small scale on purpose, I live off of this, I want to achieve all the good things available. But not through compromising what I do.

RPK: […][K]akskytviis vuotta duunannu musaa ja mun ajava voima on ollu se et […] mä en vaan haluu tehä peruskampetta. […] Mä teen niin fiilispohjalta musaa et mun pitää olla fiiliksissä ni […] mulle ei vaan enää riitä tai ei oo pitkään aikaan riittäny se mitä perusjutuil tarkotetaan varsinki jos puhutaan Suomen musageimistä. Nyt mä en puhu kaikista, Suomes löytyy paljon pinnan alla tosi hyvii tekijöit mut se semmone iso kuva suomimusast se on must aika leimii, kaikki poppijutut. […] [M]ä en oo koskaan hirveesti pushannu ulkomaille mut mä teen musaa ikäänku mä oisin jossain maailman kentillä. Mikä lopult ehkä tietyl taval osuu mua omaan kantapäähän mut minkäs teet. Jos sä tykkäät jostain niin sä teet sitä tai niin mä oon päättäny. Et mä en tee mitään muuta ku mist mä tykkään. Kyl.
INKA: […] [N]äkisitsä et sul on jotenki ug-asenne sit ehkä musantekoon?
RPK: On on mut mä en oo ikinä sanonu ei sille et musiikin pitäis olla pientä vaan sen takii et mä haluun pitää sen ug:na. Se on ehkä semmone minkä haluun tuoda julki. Mul on monta projektii mist mä ite oisin voinu kelaa et se ois voinu olla isompaaki se meininki ku mitä se on ollu. Ja […] siihe on ollu mahollisuudetki mutta johtuen ulkopuolisist seikoist mitä ei ihan täysin ymmärrä Suomen musageimi on aika paska sit ku mennään sinne isommalle. Mua ei yhtään haittais olla isommil keikoilla. Itseasias […] se on tietyl tavalla kaikki se mihin mä oon aina pyrkiny silti. Toki mä räppään niinku ug:sti mut seki on ehkä enemmän […] semmone asenne tietsä. […] Se ei oo itseisarvo emmä tahalleen haluu pitää paskaa pienenä, mä elän tällä, mä haluun kaiken sen hyvän mitä voi saada. Mut en sillä et mä tingin siitä mitä mä teen.

(RPK i2015)

In this extract, RPK constructs his own music making and personal aesthetic preferences as an artist as the opposite of "lame" or "basic" mainstream pop music, and suggests that "under the surface" music makers are more creative. This prompted me to ask if he then considers his own music making to represent a more underground approach, as he clearly differentiated himself from what he describes as the pop trend followers when stating that he makes music based more on vibes or feelings. Prior in this same interview, RPK explained that he prefers to listen to or make music which is "weird" ("härö") and aesthetically more complex. Above, he adds that he usually aims to make music which is "one step ahead" in other words not necessarily similar to currently popular ("basic") music. Through these arguments, RPK creates a discursive juxtaposition where he contrasts his own music, described as more complex and not following mass trends, with what he portrays as the less imaginative and more market oriented mainstream music. RPK further compliments this by remarking that while he has not necessarily attempted to reach

success abroad or in the Finnish pop mainstream, he has always aimed at producing innovative music in a way that brings food to the table. RPK also underscores that he would not mind achieving bigger successes; remaining underground is not "a value in and of itself."

This extract is interesting considering the previous section (6.1.2) where RPK admitted taking into consideration audiences in terms of their musical knowledge and tastes during his music making process. It appears that as long as he is the one in control, he is able to make musical concessions that do take into consideration the *audience* tastes, but when faced with *industry* demands, the potential loss of autonomy is not compatible with his artistry. RPK displays a distrust towards the mainstream music scene, or "the big game." The system has perhaps not always proven to be accommodating to the kind of aesthetics or style of rapping RPK has.

This distrust towards the industry, however, does not prevent him from striving towards mainstream success. As discussed already in section 6.1.1, success is not antithetical to staying true to artistic and aesthetic aims, and RPK states above that he doesn't want to remain small scale or underground on purpose. For example Jeffries (2011: 136) argues that displaying material wealth or being successful in hip hop are not automatically considered as fake because people often construct and understand authenticity in subjective, situational, and contradictory ways. Yet, it becomes evident that RPK is not ready to compromise, as he portrays his aesthetic preferences as more or less independent and different from current commercial mainstream music (cf. Strachan 2007: 254). In this way, the extract above is perfectly in line with what Speers (2014: 120) defines as underground values: "creative control and freedom of expression over commercial success and a high regard for sincerity." RPK's argumentation illustrates well the idea that underground is not "diametrically opposed" to mainstream (Speers 2014: 120), and in this particular context, that the mainstream or the underground do not have fixed aesthetics: according to RPK, even a more "innovative" (and underground) sound could potentially reach mainstream success. Also, as Moore (2002: 218) notes, "this commercial/authentic polarity is illusory, since all mass-mediated music is subject to commercial imperatives," continuing that "what matters to listeners is whether such subjection appears to be accepted, resisted, or negotiated with, by those to whom they are listening" (Moore 2002: 218).

Ameeba spoke about media attention in connection to underground vs. mainstream rap juxtaposition:

> INKA: [...]Can you even say that? That there's mainstream and there's underground?
> AMEEBA: I guess you can. But I don't know how those are determined anyway probably it's about the exposure and salaries. [...] I guess it changes when you get more exposure in the media or like [indistinct] so I think. Likely the artist

doesn't think about what they want to be themselves. Or maybe some of them do.
INKA: Ok. You haven't thought about it?
AMEEBA: Well, not really. Or like I'd rather stay a bit out of sight.
INKA: Ok. How would you if suddenly your records started selling in volumes and you started receiving interview requests and requests to perform so how would you react?
AMEEBA: There have been interview requests but then, they always fell through for some reason. Or I didn't respond or. So how I'd react if my records started selling? […] Well I mean I guess that would be fair. [indistinct] I'll accept that. Been doing it honestly after all.
INKA: What does honestly mean?
AMEEBA: Well exactly the kind of music I've wanted to make. Without bowing down to anyone like what might sell or something. I'd claim that I am capable of also making a song that could maybe fit that current pop mainstream.

INKA: […]Voiks silleen ees sanoa? Et on valtavirta ja on underground?
AMEEBA: Kai niin voi sanoa. Mut emmä tiedä miten ne nyt määritellään muutenki varmaan siitä esilläolemisesta ja palkoista. […] Kai se muuttuu siinä kohtaa sit ku on enemmän esillä mediassa tai sillain ni [epäselvää] näin mä luulisin. Tuskin se artisti ite sitä miettii mitä se haluu olla. Tai ehkä noi jotkut miettii.
INKA: Okei. Sä et oo miettiny?
AMEEBA: No en varsinaisesti. Tai et mieluummin pysyn vähän piilossa.
INKA: Okei. Miten sä jos sun levyt alkais yhtäkkii myydä tosi paljon ja sulle alkas tulla haastattelupyyntöjä ja esiintymispyyntöjä niin miten reagoisit?
AMEEBA: Onhan niitä haastispyyntöjäkin tullut mut sit ne on kaatunu johonki. Tai sit mä en oo vastannu tai. Niin miten mä reagoin jos levyt alkaa myymään? […] No ei siis kai se on ihan reilua [epäselvää] hyväksyn sen. Kuitenki tehny sitä rehellisesti.
INKA: Mitä tarkoittaa rehellisesti?
AMEEBA: No siis tasan sellasta musaa mitä oon halunnu tehdä. Kumartelematta, mihinkään sillain et mikä vois myydä tai jotain. Väittäisin kuitenki olevani kykeneväinen tekemään myös sellasen biisin mikä vois ehkä mennä nyt siihen pop-valtavirtaan.

(Ameeba i2015a)

I begin by constructing the idea that there is division between underground and mainstream, although attempting to mask it as a matter of opinion. Ameeba describes mainstream here mainly in terms of media exposure, money, and sales numbers. He

then asserts that he is not interested in such exposure, but would prefer to stay mostly "out of sight." Ameeba connects honesty with authenticity; he suggests that because his music was made sincerely, he would have earned the potential success as he never directly aimed to achieve it. In other words, if success comes "organically," without conscious effort, it does not constitute selling out. Authenticity in this case equals once again artistic independence and following your own ideas in music making, aligning with the category of personal-experiential authenticity. Ameeba discursively contrasts honest music making with inauthentic music making which appears as "straight-forwardly, cynically, commercial" (Frith 2007: 326). We are again dealing with a discussion of values. "Authentic success" has been constructed somewhat similarly in rock as proof of quality, as noted by popular music scholar Keir Keightley (2001: 132), in other words that the eventual success was earned because rock is inherently different from the "bad" pop mainstream. As Anttonen (2015: 86) notes: "The separation between rock and pop was a separation between art and commerce: the latter should not be mixed with artistic integrity."

As seen above, RPK's views are close to Ameeba's in that honest music making and success are not mutually exclusive. "Selling out" is not synonymous with making it, rather, compromising your integrity and aesthetic preferences in the process is. Making pop songs as such is not a sign of inauthenticity, as Ameeba highlights that he would be "capable" of making a pop song; music's dishonesty is rather something that has to do with lack of commitment towards making good quality music (cf. Frith 2007: 326). Ameeba, then, accentuates his own commitment to his music making and thus constructs authenticity. Later Ameeba added one facet to this conversation; music is sacred to him and thus should move listeners on some level.

> INKA: You've said that you make exactly the kind of music you want to make. What does that mean?
> AMEEBA: It means I haven't tried to force it into a certain mold or change my artistic vision to e.g. reach commercial potential. I don't rule anything out either if I want to make a pop album then I can make a pop album. However I wouldn't make a pop album where someone else dictates what it should be if I myself am not feeling it. There has to always be some viewpoint I can stand behind. [...] Although at the same time if music serves any function for me then in that sense it's quite sacred and it's meant to move something in the listener. [...] Autonomy and keeping it real while making [music] does not mean that I would not accept becoming a millionaire with my music. You should not calculate the value of art based on success, nor based on obscurity. I think it's really difficult to measure success in the art field.

INKA: Olet sanonut, että teet tasan sellaista musaa mitä itse haluat. Mitä se tarkoittaa?
AMEEBA: Sitä että en oo koittanu pakottaa sitä mihinkään tiettyyn muottiin tai muuttanut taiteellista näkemystäni esim. kaupallisen potentiaalin saavuttamiseksi. En silti myöskään sulje mitään pois jos haluan tehdä pop-levyn niin voin tehdä pop-levyn. En kuitenkaan tekis pop-levyä missä joku muu sanois mitä sen pitäis olla jos en sitä ite fiilaa. Siinä on aina oltava joku kulma minkä takana voin seisoo. […] Vaikkakin samaan aikaan jos musiikilla on joku funktio mulle niin se on siinä mielessä aika pyhä ja sillä on tarkotus liikuttaa jotain kuulijassa. […] Omaehtoisuus ja aitona pitäminen tekemisessä ei kuitenkaan tarkoita sitä että en hyväksyisi tulevani miljoonääriks omalla musallani. Ei taiteen arvon pitäisi laskea menestyksestä, eikä niin ikään myöskään tuntemattomuudesta. Mun mielestä taiteenkentillä on tosi vaikee mitata menestystä.

(Ameeba i2017)

Using the word "sacred" here attaches music not only to the spiritual/religious realm, but also constructs the idea that the music is "engaging with something 'more' than just pleasure or fun" (Keightley 2001: 129). Frith (2007: 326) has defined "bad" music as lacking the ability to communicate, although so-called bad music has also often been portrayed as inauthentic or dishonest (Keightley 2001: 133). As Keightley (2001: 133) notes, "alienation is the undesirable opposite of authenticity" (see also Frith 2007: 326). Music's inability to communicate creates a disconnection between the person behind the song (composer/performer) and the listener, and Ameeba constructs this connection as pivotal for his music making. Yet, he does not specify in what way music should move the listener. Perhaps those emotions can also be negative ones, as long as the communication is somehow unmediated? Ameeba also revisits the idea that earning money through music is not equivalent to becoming a sell-out; keeping it real entails autonomy, which can remain in tact even while becoming a millionaire. The quality of art should not be evaluated based on financial success. Yet, Ameeba also underscores that authenticity or realness in music making entails not pursuing commercial success deliberately, but being able to stand behind your own music. This does not automatically exclude certain genres or styles of music.

Like Ameeba, Julma Henri talked about the issue of underground and mainstream from the point of view of media exposure and major labels. The discussion revolved around mainstream demands and retaining his artistic integrity, or staying true to himself:

INKA: So how do you see yourself now in this underground-mainstream thing?

JULMA HENRI: Well [...] I'm not in any mainstream media. [...] So then I'm in the underground if I'm not there. [...] But sure it would be nice if. [My] music was played on the radio or somewhere else. It's just not possible at the moment.
INKA: Mm. Why do you think it's not possible?
JULMA HENRI: Well [...] basically I don't have a record deal with anyone through whom I could get there. That's probably a prerequisite. Another prerequisite is then that I would have to make music which could go on, would fit what it's supposed to be like.
INKA: Mm. And you're not ready to make that kind [of music]? Or you don't want to?
JULMA HENRI: But that's, that's a common misconception that many people make songs like that, like now I will go on the radio. But then when they don't have that deal or that guy putting it there then they won't get there but they make that shitty song and then everyone's disappointed in it. But they don't get it, that you have to get through to the lane. The song won't help you. But I'm not ready to do that at the moment.
INKA: Mm. So even if there were a lane you wouldn't change [your music]?
JULMA HENRI: Well maybe if I really wanted to make a song like that then I would but. Well what I've read about it some music station manager story that they like test with some guys what is the least disturbing music for advertisers. So if that's the ideal that you have to reach then. So far at least it hasn't been what I have wanted to do.

INKA: Ni miten sä näät ittes nytten tässä ug-valtavirta-hommassa?
JULMA HENRI: No […] emmää oo missään valtavirta mediassa. […] Et sittenhän mä oon siellä ug:ssa jossen mä oo siellä. […] Mut oishan se mukavaa jos. Musiikki vois soia radiossa tai muualla. Ei se nyt vaan oo tällä hetkellä mahollista.
INKA: Mm. Miks se sun mielestä ei oo mahollista?
JULMA HENRI: No […] periaatteessa mulla ei oo levytyssopimusta kenenkään semmosen kanssa jonka kautta sinne voi päästä. Se on varmaan se kynnyskysymys. Toinen kynnyskysymys on sitte et mun pitäis varmaan tehä semmosta musiikkia joka vois mennä sinne, sopia siihen minkälaista sen pitäis olla.
INKA: Mm. Ja sä et oo valmis tekee sellasta? Tai sä et halua?
JULMA HENRI: Mut sehän, se on yleinen harhaluulo että monihan tekkee sitte semmosia biisejä, että nyt minä menen radioon. Mut sitte ku niillä ei oo sitä sitä diiliä eikä sitä tyyppiä joka laittaa sen sinne ni ei ne pääse sinne vaan tekkee sen paskan biisin ja sitte kaikki pettyy siihen. Mutku ne ei tajua tätä että sun täytyy

> *päässä sieltä väylästä sisään. Et se biisi ei auta. Mut emmää kyllä nyt oo valmis semmoseen.*
> *INKA: Mm. Nii et vaik se väylä ois ni sä et muuttais [musiikkia]?*
> *JULMA HENRI: No ehkä jos mä oikeesti haluaisin tehä semmosen biisin ni sitte mä oisin mutta. No mitä mä oon lukenu siit se joku musiikkipäällikön juttu että ne testailee joillaki tyypeillä että mikä on mahollisimman mainostajia häiritsemätöntä musiikkia. Niin jos se on sitte se ihanne et siihen pitää osua niin se. Ei toistaseksi ainakaan ollu se mitä on halunnu tehä.*
>
> (Julma Henri i2017)

In Julma Henri's case, as seen above, opposing the mainstream is not a straightforward attitude, but rather an issue of incompatibility with industry standards and his countercultural ideas. However, it becomes evident that this relates to pop rap content as well as industry policies. His answer also shows signs of mistrust towards the pop industry, which is rather common among underground rappers (Hess 2005: 308) and independent labels (Strachan 2007). Here, Julma Henri implicitly references the discussion around music's effects (cf. Frith 2007: 23–25) and lyrics in particular when stating that commercial radio needs to accommodate its clientele's target. He defines this target as reaching audiences without offending anyone. As discussed above, this kind of "sanitized" sound and content is not necessarily appreciated by underground rappers and their listeners, and it seems not by Julma Henri either, as he says he refuses to accommodate his music in this way. Historically, the sanitazation of hip hop has been the result of white-controlled and often racist music industry's attempts to erase the voices and contributions of black and brown artists and their cultural and societal critiques (Keyes 2002; Rose 1994; Forman 2002).

Like with RPK, also here a distrust is evident in Julma Henri's responses regarding the music industry, for example how it is impossible to get radio play if you are not signed to a certain record label. This also came up during my previous interview with him (Julma Henri i2015). Above, Julma Henri thus explains his view of the industry power structures, suggesting that mainstream exposure is only allocated for major label artists and those who fit format radio stations' narrow selection of content neutral music. Discursively, Julma Henri's critique is close to the Adornian view of the culture industry where the market controls and defines art, reducing it to a capitalist product like any other consumer goods (see Barber 2010: 59; Negus 1995: 319). According to popular music scholar Keith Negus (1995: 319), these kinds of arguments are usually driven by the belief that authentic music opposes the corporate control, and by remaining autonomous, such music is able to express the artist's own voice. Stratton (1982: 273) suggests that capitalist music production in fact depends on the separation of the creative artist and the commercial industry due to the ideological and pervasive conception among consumers that

anything commercial is "bad"; reconciling this thus demands that the connection between creativity and capitalism is obscured.

Let us consider Julma Henri's logic for a moment. Borrowing from K. Barnes, sociologist Jarl Ahlkvist (2001: 343) states that "record companies use radio to promote their records and stations use music to target listeners that are attractive to advertisers." In his discussion on format radio, media and cultural studies scholar Simon Barber (2010: 57) argues that programming based on market research often leads to a limited variety of music as it tries to please most listeners, the masses. Popular music scholar Simon Barber (2010) demonstrates that the aim is to produce something seemingly easy to listen to which is condensed into a framework of predetermined length, melodies, and other musical elements, hence also affecting music making (see also Hiltunen 2016: 2). Julma Henri thus appears to be correct in assuming that regular radio play entails taking these conditions into consideration. What is more interesting considering the present study, however, is his assertion that he does not *want* to submit his music to such imperatives. In this way, he discursively constructs an ideal similar to Adorno, one of independent and critical music vis-à-vis the culture industry (cf. Negus 1995: 319).

As I was interested in knowing more about how Julma Henri perceives his own position in the rap music scene, I asked about his songs "Väärät profeetat" ("False prophets"; Julma H 2016b) and "Elukka" aka "Kuka Muu Muka 2" (alternate names: "Animal"/"Who else 2"; Julma H 2016a) and what inspired him to write them. The first song references the Finnish pop rap duo Profeetat (Prophets), made up of two mainstream solo artists Cheek and Elastinen. The latter of these Julma H songs references Cheek's solo album entitled *Kuka Muu Muka* (2013).

> INKA: […] What then made you write those songs? [...] [D]id you want to achieve something by writing those songs?
> JULMA HENRI: Well False Prophets song for example. All artists know the system if they've been around a bit longer and they've seen how songs get airplay and so on, maybe they've released [music] on a small label and then on a big label. [...] It basically can be proven you can ask anyone who's been around longer how this thing works. They will likely agree. And. I wanted to shatter that image, that there's these guys on top because I didn't think it was true. Like without this entertainment system they wouldn't be played anywhere, no no. If you go and ask some kid there on the street they don't listen to them [Prophets]. Or well maybe someone might listen but. If you're interested in rap or so on then no. There is no [rap] royalty or such. I just wanted to shatter that image and then maybe explain what this is this. Machinery that upholds this situation. And maybe on that Who Else Two well, I wanted to laugh at it, a bit like at myself. And of course you have to laugh at Cheek a bit but.

INKA: […] Mikä sut sai sitten tekee ne biisit ikäänku? […] [H]alusitsä saada jotain aikaan sillä että sä teit ne biisit?
JULMA HENRI: No se Väärät profeetat biisi esimerkiksi. Kaikki artistit tietää sen koneiston jos on vähän pidempään ollu ja nähny miten biisejä otetaan soittoon ja näin poispäin, ehkä julkassu pienellä levy-yhtiöllä ja sitte isolla levy-yhtiöllä. […] Se periaatteessa on todennettavissa että voi kysyä keneltä tahansa joka on pitempään ollu että miten tää homma toimii. Niin ne varmaan on samaa mieltä. Ja. Mää halusin särkeä sen kuvan että nää tyypit on siellä huipulla koska mun mielestä se ei ollu totta. Et ilman tätä viihdekoneistoa niin eihän ne sois missään, ei ei. Jos meet kysymään joltaki pennulta tuossa kadulla ni ei ne niitä [Profeettoja] kuuntele. Tai no ehkä joku saattaa kuunnella mutta. Jos on räpistä kiinnostunu tai näin poispäin ni ei se. Ei semmosta kuninkuutta ole tai mitään. Mä halusin särkee vaan sen kuvan ja sit kertoo että mikä tää on tää. Koneisto joka ylläpitää tätä tilannetta. Ja ehkä siinä Kuka muu muka kakkosella niin, mä halusin nauraa sille, vähän ittelleni. Ja vähän tietenki Cheekille pittää nauraa mutta.

(Julma Henri i2017)

Above, Julma Henri discursively equates the rap duo Prophets as something other than rap music and thus further undermines the media portraying them as the kings of Finnish rap.[97] Yet, rather than directly opposing Cheek or Elastinen as artists, Julma Henri turns his critique more towards the industry machinery and major labels ("the system") which translate the Prophets into a (false) success story seemingly resulting from the artistic greatness of Cheek and Elastinen. Julma Henri argues that in reality, the industry has put these artists on the platform and their supposed artistic superiority is a lie everyone in the music business knows. Thus, "bad music" here equals "a bad system of production" (see Frith 1996: 69). Also Ameeba has spoken of the "commercial music machinery" rather critically, stating that while he, too, acknowledges that people tend to like things they find familiar, the machinery "knows the tricks well" and thus manipulates listeners through forcefed repetition and by using nuances from well-known hits (Ameeba i2017). Musicologist Riikka Hiltunen (2016: 25) in her study shows that certain similarity or familiarity between pop songs is considered a positive trait by professional pop music writers; through his critique, Ameeba discursively constructs other types of music making practices as ethically more sustainable and contributes to an idealized image of underground music making.

97 See the media article (in Finnish) by Ninni Suomalainen (2016) where she calls Prophets by this moniker.

Additionally, Julma Henri suggests that we should not take Cheek too seriously; this is reminiscent of the discursive opposionality between rock as a supposedly serious style of music and pop as its opposite (Keightley 2001: 128), only here the juxtaposition occurs between "real" rap and pop rap; children who listen to rap would not listen to Cheek. This idea is even more pronounced on Julma Henri's collaborative song "Raja" ("Limit," Julma Henri & Sairas T 2017) with underground rapper Sairas T, where both artists criticize pop music industry and Julma Henri chants in the refrain "ne kuuntelee poppii mä kuuntelen räppii" ("they listen to pop I listen to rap"). In this way, Julma Henri constructs Cheek as part of the pop mainstream, outside the "real" rap genre, and undermines the value and integrity of such music. Cheek and similar artists become associated with purely pop industry bred puppets, unable or unwilling to detach themselves from the control of this "machinery" (cf. Strachan 2007). This, ultimately, is portrayed as the denigrated form of pop music and epitome of inauthenticity and fakeness. This form of argumentation also discursively attaches ideas of positive authenticity and realness onto independent artists such as Julma Henri or Ameeba (see Keightley 2001: 128 on how this has occurred in rock music).

Note that Julma Henri does not address consumption here, but rather the production of pop rap; in other words, he does not criticize the audiences listening to pop rap but the industry producing it. Keightley (2001: 129) highlights that by placing the focus "on the conditions of aesthetic and industrial production" of the genre, it is possible to obscure the fact that both independent and mainstream music are part of consumer capitalism. This, then, constructs the authenticity of those artists portrayed as separate from pop mainstream. As Strachan (2007: 252) explains, independent culture portrays itself as being about the music and functioning "outside" the music industry machinery, which supposedly does not value music, but also that "indie practitioners have a different motivation and mindset" which is supposedly more personal and less detached from the audience.

Julma Henri's ideas can be further illustrated with the following lyrics from his song "Väärät Profeetat" ("False Prophets," Julma H 2016):

Music and media run by monopoly
And you're just that fucking limelight monkey

Musiikki ja media monopolin vallassa
Ja sä oot vaa se fakin framille nostettu apina

Without a name on the contract they won't play you on the radio
Does victory have any worth if you're the only one in the competition?

Jos ei nimee soppareissa et tuu soimaan radiossa
Onko voitolla mitää arvoo jos oot ainoo kilpailussa?

("Väärät Profeetat" ["False Prophets"], Julma H 2016)

The music industry patterns and rules described in this song are far removed from the kind of artistic integrity that the four artists in this study say they aspire to. As journalist Arttu Seppänen writes (2017), the Prophets, Cheek and Elastinen, assume a biblical narrative[98] of preaching in order to construct their artist personas. In their songs such as "Yhtäccii" ("Suddenly," Profeetat 2016), these personas preach the gospel of neoliberal capitalism and accumulated wealth (including women as consumables) and success as a sign of their artistic superiority, which according to Julma Henri is false. This opposionality towards the Finnish music industry models also becomes attached to Julma Henri's underground artist image via his songs. As the focus of this study is on discourses, and space is limited, I will not detail further the logic of music industry and to which extent Julma Henri's representations describe the industry accurately.[99]

Besides Julma Henri, also Khid's song "Ei" ("No," Khid x RPK 2014a) from the similarly titled album condemns the pop format radio and industry. In the lyrics, Khid contrasts format music and format radio channels which contain music that is "plastic," and "cast in one mold," in other words music that is imitative and does not evoke any ideas or emotions. Khid discursively constructs RPK's (referenced with his alias Rumpukone) and his joint efforts as superior to such shallow forms of music. According to the lyrics, the pop format, including format radio, kills creativity and introduces faceless marketing and copying, in essence, unoriginality. Khid's lyrics thus participate in constructing the same discourse as the interviews in this study. Interestingly, the four rappers refer rather consistently to pop mainstream or the mainstream at large instead of the rap mainstream. As seen with Julma Henri, this is also a way of undermining the status of pop rap as rap.

In the current subchapter, I have illustrated how the artists discuss their music in terms of their position as underground artists in the music industry, thus addressing particularly the question of how they construct the discourse(s) on authenticity in relation to the Finnish music industry and their relationship with their audience. The

98 This is interesting in its own right and particularly in the framework of post-Christianity, but is unfortunately outside the scope of this study. See, however, Westinen (2014) who touches upon Cheek's use of Christian tropes in her analysis.

99 For more on the workings of popular music industry generally see for example Negus (1995), Frith (1996), Wikström (2009), and in Finland specifically Hiltunen (2016), and Kaitajärvi-Tiekso (2016).

heading of this subchapter underscores what these underground artists construct as an ideal: art for art's sake, independent of commercial or audience demands, yet considerate of listeners and fans. The worth of music then becomes based on something other than how many units are sold, a discursive strategy which can be seen as an attempt to undermine the power of the industry over the artists' music and as a way to construct underground identity. This form of authenticity as independence pertains to the category of personal-experiential authenticity, as outlined in section 3.2.1. Yet, as RPK in particular highlighted, all artists think about their audience, and the pressure they experience from their listeners can become a positive and productive aspect of music making. Also Khid noted that artists experience joy about being liked by their listeners. An uncompromising attitude does not entail complete detachment from other actors in the world of music. This also exemplifies that different actors may have differing attitudes towards others in the music scene: whereas for example DJs, who are music mediators more than creators, spend a considerable time thinking about audience reactions and preferences (Ramstedt 2017), the rap artists in this study construct an ideal where art and the artist remain relatively independent vis-à-vis audience and industry opinions. Based on the material analyzed above, and concurring with Strachan (2007: 249), I conclude that discourses of artistic integrity and commercialism and the juxtaposing of art and industry products still hold substantial relevance.

6.2 Authenticity and ageing in the rap scene

This subchapter analyzes how the rappers understand and reflect on hip hop's pervasive authenticity discourse. It became clear during my interviews with the artists that they recognize authenticity, or keeping it real, as a kind of genre rule that characterizes hip hop culture. Indeed, it is possible to apply musicologist Franco Fabbri's moniker of "hyperrule" to authenticity, entailing that "we can easily attribute [it] the name of 'ideology' of that genre" (Fabbri 1981: 55). According to Fabbri (1981), a hyperrule also sets a hierarchy for other genre rules. Specifically, the Finnish rap artists analyzed in this study recognize a normative discourse which values sincerity and self-centeredness, among other things, as part of an "authentic" hip hop expression. This discourse seems to traverse global hip hop culture (Ochmann 2013) while other local(ized) discourses and developments shape and (re)construct it (Bennett 2004: 188; cf. Oravcová 2013; Speers 2014; Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003). Also for example Alastair Pennycook (2007: 102) speaks of a global "hip-hop ideology of keepin' it real" but which is "always pulled into local ways of being" (see also Sandve 2014: 46, 67). Equally, hip hop scholar William Eric Perkins (1996: 20) speaks of "the religion and ideology of authenticity" in the context of (US) gangsta rap. Further, Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2007:

8) asserts that "the 'cult of authenticity' […] dictates how performers walk, talk, and express themselves artistically." Krims (2000: 48) also insinuates it is "one of the principal validating strategies" for rap as a genre.

Khid, RPK and Julma Henri use various terms when explicitly addressing the discourse on hip hop authenticity. I am aware of the loss that necessarily occurs in translation. "Aitous," which I have translated as both authenticity and real(ness) depending on the context, was the most common variant in their responses and it is clearly a notion that is well established in the Finnish rap scene; I did not have to explain myself or even pose specific questions, instead I simply asked them to reflect on the term "aitous." I also did not want to "feed" the artists too many ideas, hence I refrained from asking more specific questions while using the term. RPK also used the English phrase "keep(ing) it real" which I myself did not use. Khid added his own verb form, "aitoilla," which I have translated as keeping it real, as this is the only verb variant I am aware of in English. "Aito" ("real") was also a term the artists used. In the next section, I analyze how the artists conceptualize the ideology of authenticity.

6.2.1 "Keeping it real" is not keeping it real: the ideology

While for example Khid recognizes the existence of an ideology of authenticity in rap music, he says he finds it annoying. The irritation of artists towards the recurrence of this theme in hip hop was something noted already by McLeod (1999: 139) in the 1990s.

> INKA: […] How do you feel about rap authenticity?
> KHID: Well really fucking annoying. Or I mean in my opinion all authenticity is really annoying because I think authenticity is about trying to express to other people what we ourselves are. And […] about trying to express how others are wrong. In my opinion authenticity in a way is such a worn out and overused thing […] like there's some rule or a set of norms and then you have to follow them. […] So then that kind of rap keeping it real I get it, I've been like that myself but. [...][I]f you have to keep it real in rap then you should also in my opinion keep it real in society which is like if we live in the society that tells us to get two and a half kids and this amount of monthly income and two cars and a house then it's sort of [...] life dictated by outside pressure. Which at least to me sounds terribly frightening […]. I think there's also the paradox that if you're keeping it real then there's this strong, usually people who are trying to keep it real a lot it's really tied up with their identity and their existentialism like I'm this guy. But then what you are is made up of what the rulebook says you have

to be. So kind of like you're being real and at the same time you're something someone else tells you to be.

INKA: […] Mitä mieltä sä oot räppiaitoudesta?
KHID: No ihan vitun ärsyttävää. Tai siis ku mun mielest kaikki aitous on ihan super ärsyttävää koska mun mielest aitoudella pyritään ilmaisemaan muille mitä itse ollaan. Ja […] *sitä kuinka muut on väärässä. Mun mielest tavallaan aitous on niin kulunu ja ylikäytetty juttu […] et on olemassa joku sääntö tai normisto ja sitten sitä tulee noudattaa […] Ni sit sellanen räppiaitoilu mä ymmärrän sen, mä oon iteki ollu sellanen mut. […][J]os pitää räppiaitoilla niin sit pitäis myös mun mielestä yhteiskunta-aitoilla, joka on taas sitä et jos me eletään yhteiskunnassa joka sanoo meille et pitää hankkia kaks ja puol lasta ja näin paljon kuukausituloja ja kaks autoo ja omakotitalo ni sehän on tavallaan […] ulkopuolisten paineiden määrittämää, elämää. Joka kuulostaa mun mielest ainaki kauheen pelottavalta […] Ku siin on mun mielest myös se paradoksi et jos sä aitoilet ni siin on vahvasti semmone, yleensä ihmisillä jotka aitoilee paljon ni se on tosi sidoksissa niiden identiteettiin ja niiden eksistentialismiin silleen et mä oon tää tyyppi. Mut sitten se mitä sä oot koostuu siitä mitä tämä sääntökirja sanoo et sun tulee olla. Niin tavallaan se et sä oot aito ja samaan aikaan sä oot jotain mitä joku muu sanoo.*

(Khid i2015)

Khid elaborates above about the normative restrictions or "rulebook" which the ideology of authenticity sets, a pressure to conform to a certain behaviour which, according to him, is "worn out" and the logic behind it is "overused." He characterizes authenticity as being not only about self-expression but also about trying to prove to other people how alternative ways of hip hop expression are "wrong" within that ideology – and thus authenticity appears as restrictive. According to Khid's logic, conforming to the hip hop authenticity norms entails conforming to society's norms; he is thus generalizing norm conformity to apply to all aspects of life, and characterizes such a person as generally lacking the capacity for independent thought. These types of people then become associated with a stereotype of confining to middle class standards, indicated here for example by a fictitious average number of children and certain material possessions, which is quite the antithesis to the rebellious and devious historical image of hip hop (e.g. Rose 1994; Chang 2005; Quinn 2005) or youth music subcultures more generally (e.g. Hebdige 1979). At the same time, Khid's critical tone towards such standards positions him as the voice of millennial rap listeners who are challenging their parents' generation's life style and life goals. In Khid's explanation, the ideology of keeping it real is, essentially, the opposite of authenticity. In this same

interview, Khid mentioned that also the *Ei* ("No," Khid x RPK, 2014a) album was full of angst and particularly angst against predetermined ideas about what is keeping it real and "against a kind of philosophy according to which there is only one right way of doing things" ("semmosta filosofiaa vastaan et asiat ois vaan yhdellä tavalla oikein," Khid i2015).

Interestingly, while Khid addresses the idea of a "rulebook" as dictating the content of hip hop authenticity and the contradiction related to following it, this very same problem was also addressed by UK rapper Chester P (Speers 2014: 153) according to whom keeping it real is "a fixed uniform that people have to wear to be accepted." Khid labels authenticity or keeping it real a paradox, very much like Chester P, but focuses more on the question of individual identity rather than just belonging to a group; keeping it real becomes inauthentic because it entails that our identity consists of simply following rules that someone else has determined. Also for example drummer and hip hop artist Questlove (of the Roots) has expressed similar irritation towards a way of thinking where following the supposed standards of the hip hop culture equals being real (Marshall 2006: 872).

Yet Khid also associates authenticity and keeping it real with something positive and fundamental to hip hop, as he continues:

> KHID: But I get it [...] keeping it real is also [...] in my opinion also in a way puts things into a similar framework than when you play hockey so you need a stick and [...] skates and so forth. So in a way keeping it real can also make these like personal experiences much richer maybe and more wholesome then if you're that guy who eats sleeps and shits hip hop and you dig it then maybe you'll get more out of it than me who does not dig it, in a way.
>
> *KHID: Mut mä ymmärrän sen […] aitoilu on myös […] asettaa mun mielest tietyl taval myös samanlaisiin viitekehyksiin ku se et jos sä pelaat lätkää ni sä tarviit mailan ja […] luistimet ja tolleen. Et tavallaan aitoilu voi myös tehä semmosista henkilökohtasist kokemuksista ehkä rikkaampii ja kokonais-valtasempii ku sit jos sä oot se tyyppi joka syö nukkuu ja paskoo hiphoppii ja sä diggaat siitä ni ehkä sä saat siit enemmän sillon irti kun minä joka ei diggaa siitä, tietyl taval.*
>
> (Khid i2015)

Here, Khid not only acknowledges the possibility of gaining more meaning through hip hop and through a sense of belonging to hip hop culture but also admits having been "that guy" who enjoys fully embracing hip hop culture (and perhaps also conforms to the norms). Khid still explicitly contrasts his current self with this

position in the above quotation. Clearly, however, the authenticity discourse matters to him – and to other artists – as he claims to experience annoyance and not for example indifference. More than that, he seems to assert that the authenticity discourse is a quintessential part of hip hop with a slightly unusual comparison to equipment that is needed for playing ice hockey[100]: you cannot play the game without the required apparatus or materials. Indeed, it seems rather impossible to take part in hip hop without participating in one way or another in the authenticity debates.

Another instance where Khid is critical of hip hop as a lifestyle occurred when I asked about his song "Ateisti" ("Atheist," Khid 2016a); it provoked him to speak of "hip hop religion":

> INKA: […]You already spoke a bit about Harha but then how about Ateisti?
> KHID: Yeah. Well it's exactly like. I too during my teenage years have lived out that hip hop religion, like eating sleeping and shitting that culture and that fuss. So the atheism there [in that song] just signals that I somehow don't have the energy anymore to take part in that rap religiosity. Because so often many people who make rap then they always talk about what things belong in this. [...] Making songs where you know women are talked about in a degrading manner and. Well there are songs like that. If you think about that text you feel like that artist is a complete idiot. But then often I feel like like if some guy for example makes a song which is like for example really degrading towards women and then they ask that person in an interview so why did you make a song like this then easily [...] the answer that creates a certain guiltlessness is always in the form that well hey it's part of this thing, this is rap. I think that's just annoying. Yeah it may be part of it but [clicks tongue] then, you wouldn't do anything else either [...] if it doesn't represent your values then you wouldn't do anything else either because it's part of something.
>
> *INKA: […]Täst Harhast sä vähän puhuit mut mites toi Ateisti?*
> *KHID: Ni. Niin no se on just sitä et. Iteki on teinivuosina eläny sitä hiphop-uskontoa et syö nukkuu ja paskoo sitä kulttuuria ja sitä tohinaa. Ni sit tossa [kappaleessa] se ateismi vaa viittaa just siihen et mä en jotenki jaksa enää ottaa osaa siihen räppiuskovaisuuteen. Ku tosi paljon monet ketkä tekee räppii ni ne aina puhuu siitä et mitkä asiat tähän kuuluu. […] Tehään biisei mis tiedätsä puhutaan naisista halventavaan sävyyn ja. No siis on olemas sellasii biisei et. Jos sen tekstin miettii ni tulee sellane olo et toi artisti on täys idiootti. Mut sitte usein*

[100] Then again Finnish rap music is quite ubiquitous in Finnish ice hockey games at the moment (e.g. Ahlsved 2016: 21), and for example the Finnish rap duo JVG would arguably not have reached mainstream popularity in the beginning of their career without ice hockey themed rap songs (cf. Friman 2016: 5–11).

> *must tuntuu et jos joku tyyppi tekee vaikka biisin joka on tosi sillee vaikka naisia halventavaa ja sit silt kysytään jossain haastattelus et no miks sä teit tämmösen biisin ni sitte helposti se […] vastaus joka ikäänku luo semmosen syyntakeettomuuden ni se on aina siinä muodossa et no mut hei et tää kuuluu tähän, tää on räppii. Mun mielest se on vaan ärsyttävää. Joo kyl se voi siihe kuuluu mut [maiskauttaa] sitte, ethän sä tee mitään muutakaan […] jos se ei edusta sun arvomaailmaa ni ethän sä tee mitään muutakaa siten et se kuuluu johonki.*
>
> (Khid i2016)

Khid explains here that the "atheism" of his artist persona is linked with his resignation from hip hop standards. Khid's notion of hip hop religion as imposing an all-around worldview and lifestyle without room to choose your own values is why he calls himself an atheist: according to his argumentation, anything else would be inauthentic because it would not be in tune with his personal worldview and values. Khid also connects the discussion with his own aging; his teenage self was perhaps following that ideology and enjoyed it but has since converted. Atheistic thinking has strongly advocated the idea that human reason can make the world a better place and contribute to social progress when freed from dogmas imposed by religion (Edis 2013: 404). Here, Khid uses this same argument in a hip hop context, suggesting that for example sexism might be less prevalent in rap if rappers reflected critically on their content instead of following ideological understandings of hip hop authenticity which are based on hypermasculinity and sexism.

Khid also makes the same point as Tricia Rose (2008) about how rappers use authenticity as an excuse to include and perpetuate misogyny in hip hop as a seemingly natural and integral part of the culture. Khid argues that misogynistic music is stupid, which reflects the discussion around bad music, as stupid music "seems to deny what we're capable of, humanly, rationally, ethically, aesthetically" (Frith 2007: 327). There is also another view on authenticity which Khid and Rose (2008: 146) share, that "'realness' […] as a form of containment that limits youth expression through its unreal emphasis on smaller and smaller aspects of everyday life." Although Rose (2008: 146) speaks primarily about black experience and criticizes the ways in which music industry exploits and via stereotyping contributes to problems in black communities, this argument in my opinion manifests also in how Khid characterizes the authenticity ideology's logic more generally as creating a belief system which limits self-expression and critical thinking.

According to the logic Khid describes above, people do not generally conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to their values. Khid's attitude towards such discrepant behaviour (acting contrary to our beliefs) is accentuated by him clicking his tongue, as if to express irritation or resentment. Being an atheist, in short,

becomes equated with critical thinking about and even refusal of hip hop's authenticity norms. Based on the above argumentation, Khid could be labelled an "alternative" rap artist in the sense that he is against many things that he constructs as mainstream hip hop culture, which also matches the way in which he talks about (underground) rap aesthetics in subchapter 4.3. Khid thus criticizes the cultural-historical authenticity defined earlier in this study, or the "purism […] that seeks to use the original impulses of the culture as a scripture to guide future creativity" (Williams 2014: 45). The notion of music culture as religion is not unfamiliar in academic discource either: Robin Sylvan (2002: 4) and Rupert Till (2010) for example compare music to religion due not only to its capacity to produce affective experiences but also to create communities with shared values and lifestyles which the music communicates. Some scholars also explicitly entertain the idea of hip hop as a religion (e.g. Miller & Pinn 2015b: 7).

When I asked RPK and Julma Henri to reflect on the discourse on authenticity or keeping it real, they concur that sincerity is crucial:

> JULMA HENRI: […] if someone makes music that I don't dig or care for, maybe this is related to authenticity that if I see that that guy is *genuinely* like that--
> RPK: Mm.
> JULMA HENRI: --and makes music like that--
> RPK: Mm.
> JULMA HENRI: --then I'll respect that.
> RPK: Yes.
> JULMA HENRI: They're expressing themselves and this is who they are and they make shit like that, somehow I respect that.
> RPK: Yes.
> JULMA HENRI: But I don't respect it if it's fake. Like there's fakeness somehow and artificial stuff then it's difficult to appreciate.
>
> *JULMA HENRI: […] jos joku tekkee semmosta musiikkia mistä mä en diggaa tai välitä, tää ehkä liittyy siihen aitouteen et jos mää nään et se aiosti on tuommone tyyppi--*
> *RPK: Mmm.*
> *JULMA HENRI: --joka tekkee tuommosta musiikkia--*
> *RPK: Mm.*
> *JULMA HENRI: --ni mää arvostan sitä.*
> *RPK: Kyllä.*
> *JULMA HENRI: Se ilmasee itteensä ja se on tuommonen ja se tekkee tuommosta paskaa, jotenki mä arvostan sitä.*

RPK: Kyllä.
JULMA HENRI: Mut sitä mä en arvosta jos se on semmosta teennäistä. Niinkö että siin on teeskentelyä jotenkin ja semmosta päälleliimattua juttua ni semmosta on hankala arvostaa.

(Euro Crack i2015)

Above, Julma Henri states that even if someone makes, according to his argumentation, extremely bad music, authenticity behind that artist's music making affords them his respect because the music reflects who they truly are. I have exceptionally left the various interjections expressing agreement into this extract to show the co-construction of the discourse: RPK concurs that making "shit" on purpose is annoying to him. In Julma Henri's description, "fake" music entails some kind of disconnection from surrounding (musical) reality (being "artificial stuff"), and appears instead as forced music making. In this way, he discursively equates authentic music with a more effortless, flowing creative process and a commitment to making "good" music.

The sincerity argument seems like the most prominent one in relation to authenticity in the discussion of Euro Crack. Julma Henri also highlights the importance of sincerity by stressing the word "aiosti" ("genuinely," the pronunciation displaying his Oulu dialect). Frith (1996: 71) notes that popular music consumers have a tendency to describe authenticity of music production according to its "perceived quality of sincerity and commitment" which is connected with "the ways in which we assess people's sincerity generally." Julma Henri's argumentation above exhibits similarities ("this is who they are"). This idea of unmediated expression is essentially the same as the social-psychological dimension (staying true to yourself) of hip hop authenticity formulated by McLeod (1999). Indeed, this is also perhaps the most ubiquitous notion of authenticity recurring, with slight variations, throughout multiple genres of popular music (Frith 1996; Moore 2002; Weisethaunet & Lindberg 2010: 471). As Jeffries (2011: 145) explains this "keeping it real" argumentation in hip hop, "staying true to oneself is an indicator of good character, and keeping it real makes someone trustworthy and sensible."

In the next section, authenticity is discussed from the perspective of ageing. The analysis shows that age-based experience can be used discursively as a way to construct authenticity.

6.2.2 Age and experience

Hip hop has typically been labelled as youth culture, not the least due to its origins as a scene developed among teenagers (e.g. Chang 2005). Ageing as a rap artist is

also a significant theme that has been portrayed for example in the documentary *Adult Rappers* (Iannacchino 2015). The notion of keeping it real was also connected to age and ageing by RPK:

> INKA: [...] [Y]ou probably know the discussion about rap authenticity.
> RPK: Mm-m.
> INKA: So your thoughts on that?
> RPK: Keep it real. I think there's some truth to that because there's nothing more stupid than deceiving or fooling yourself that's how I see it. But like the rap keep it real, is that related to [...] the sound of a certain era, then if you are born like in 2000 and keeping it real is listening to rap from 94, that's total bullshit. I've lived then and made music at that time and for me it's always been about moving forward.
> JULMA HENRI: '94 some good productions came out but listening to the lyrics now, I'm talking about that kind of mainstream rap but underground rap but mainstream like fucking awful lyrics. I've listened to Mobb Deep and stuff, I have them on in my car when I'm trying to reach some kind of nostalgic feelings but the lyrics are fucking awful. Or they're like young boy rascals like railing. [...] But maybe that's that keep it real thing that you have to be in a certain mode [...] I don't agree at all with the kind of values that the early 90s rap had at that time [...] if you translate that thing into Finnish like no, no, no way.

> *INKA: […][T]iedätte varmasti keskustelun räppiaitoudesta.*
> *RPK: Mm-m.*
> *INKA: Niin mietteet tästä?*
> *RPK: Keep it real. Mun mielest siin oli ihan totuuden perästä ajatusta koska mikään ei oo typerämpää ku huijata tai fuulata itteensä niin mä sen ajattelen. Mut sit se räppi keep it real ni liittyykse johonki tietyn aikakauden […] saundiin sit jos sä oot tyyliin syntyny kakstuhatta ja keepin' it real on kuunnella vuoden ysi neljä räppii, se on ihan paskaa. Mä oon eläny sillon ja tehny sitä musaa siihen aikaan ja itel ollu aina se et haluu liikkuu eteenpäin.*
> *JULMA HENRI: Ysi neljä tuli hyvää tuotantoa mutta nyt ku kuuntelee niitä sanotuksia, siis mää puhun nyt semmosesta valtavirtaräpistä, kuitenki UG räpistä mutta valtavirta nii ihan vitun huonoja sanotuksia. Mää oon kuunnellu jotaki Mobb Deepiä ja kaikkea, ne on mulla autossa ku mä yritin mennä johonki nostalgiafiilikseen mutta ne sanotukset on vitun huonoja. Tai ne on nuorten pojankoltiaisten semmosta vaahtoamista. […] Mutta ehkä se on sitä se keep it real juttu että pitäs olla semmosessa tietyssä moodissa […] en mää oo ennää yhtään sammaa mieltä, semmosen arvomaailman kanssa mitä se siihen aikaan*

> *oli yheksänkytluvun alun räpissä […] jos sen kääntää suomenkielelle vaikka sen jutun ni ei, ei, ei ollenkaan.*
>
> (Euro Crack i2015)

RPK recognizes the keep(ing) it real mantra or ideology already from the 1990s and questions whether it is still relevant today. RPK also differentiates between younger rappers and himself as their senior, someone with a broader knowledge base and experience. Interestingly, also in the lyrics of his single "Nälkä" (RPK 2016), which translates to "hunger," RPK mentions his ageing as an artist ("yli puolet vanhempi ku nuoret," "more than double the age of youth"), reflecting a discourse of experience and expertise. While the keeping it real ideology is here localized as a distinctly US phenomenon, RPK utilizes mainly age-based argumentation. His own career spans through the 1990s, a decade when hip hop culture spread globally and which also includes the formational years of the Finnish scene, and he uses this lived experience to establish himself as an authority to define what keeping it real is (cf. Forman 2014a; cf. McLeod 1999: 144) or definitely is not. Here, RPK assumes the knowledge- and experience-based authority of his age. A person with no experience-based knowledge is more or less dismissed as not knowing what they talk about. This is a very similar type of argument as the one made by the hip hop trio Beastie Boys' member Mixmaster Mike who claims that those who were not raised into hip hop back in the day in New York like he and some others were do not have the right to define what "real" hip hop is about (McLeod 1999: 144). Also dance studies scholar Mary Fogarty (2012) demonstrates in her study on ageing breakdancers that the experience afforded by years of practice often earns respect and skills not available to younger practitioners, and RPK seems to draw from this same argument here. Upholding the keeping it real ideology is constructed by RPK as subscribing to other people's ideas about authenticity without critical assessment of their relevance to one's own existence, and hence becomes associated with fakeness, similarly to Khid's arguments above.

We can also ponder to which extent RPK may be building on existing narratives that revere the 1980s or 1990s as "classic" or "golden age" of US hip hop, and thus afford pioneers a celebrated status in hip hop culture as originators and "true" hip hop artists. Both theatre and performance studies scholar Michael Mangan (2013: 18) and media studies and hip hop scholar Murray Forman (2014) note that being old is, more than anything, about the meaning assigned to old age, and RPK here constructs ageing as a marker of expertise and authenticity. RPK constructs himself as a veteran MC and producer who is still making music but is also able to move forward from old (and inauthentic) notions of keeping it real. He connects the English phrase "keep it real" with the Finnish term "aitous," signifying here the

ideological authenticity discourse. The above quotation demonstrates of the opposition of "'keeping it real versus 'being' real" (Speers 2014: 43), in other words trying too hard to follow cultural-historical authenticity norms and thus resulting in inauthenticity (see also Speers 2014: 18) versus following your personal-experiential ("true") views and ideas. Also in songs by Srkkpjt (Serkkupojat), one of RPK's previous rap groups, many similar criticisms emerge in the lyrics depicting resentment towards "fakeness" based on imitations of rap cool pose for example via clothes, and towards music making just for money. More implicitly, older rappers such as RPK are suggested to possess "real" authenticity thanks to long experience in rap music, thus these veteran MCs do not need the ideology of keeping it real.

The aspects of age and ageing that manifest in this current section seem cross-culturally relevant, as several of them have also come across in Forman's research on ageing MCs (Forman 2014a; 2014b). Speers (2014: 185) notes that age is often perceived as irrelevant if an artist is still eager to make music and is good at it, and accumulated experience "in the game" is a positive thing meaning your craft has improved. RPK also discussed his ideas regarding retirement from rap music in this same interview (Euro Crack i2015), which suggests that he is aware of the expectations regarding "proper" activities for a rapper of a certain age, or what popular music scholars Andy Bennett and Jodie Taylor (2012: 234) discuss as assumptions about "maturing" and hence resigning certain types of scene participation to avoid "an improper performance of one's age." Conversely here in the extract above, he points out that today's youth performing an authenticity idea from the 1990s when they were not yet part of the scene is also a type of fakeness and improper considering their age and experience. Consequently, an improper performance of age and/or experience results in lack of credibility.

In the above extract, Julma Henri continues to elaborate on rap music in the 1990s after RPK locates the authenticity discourse as something specific to that era and style in hip hop. Both rappers construct the keeping it real idea and its value as something obsolete or irrelevant today, particularly in the Finnish context. Stylistically, Julma Henri describes authenticity as a trait of underground rap, mentioning New York rap group Mobb Deep as an example. According to Julma Henri, similar artists have utilized authenticity as part of their expression and lyrics, particularly for building braggadocio ("vaahtoamista," "railing"). Note that Julma Henri attaches this idea to (young) male rappers in particular, suggesting that (hyper)masculinity has been a significant aspect of the authenticity discourse; this of course is something agreed upon by many hip hop scholars (e.g. Rose 2008; McLeod 1999; Jeffries 2011). Agewise, authenticity ideology becomes attached to younger rather than grown men, thus making it seem immature as well as an outdated "mode" of the past (the 1990s). Essentially, this ideological authenticity of the youth is the opposite of "true" realness. Further, Julma Henri argues that appropriating the US

discourse around authenticity as such to the Finnish hip hop context is not possible. In this way, he highlights that local narratives and understandings are essential for authenticity, even if the US scene functions as an inspiration for hip hop culture and practice.

Although dismissing the keeping it real ideology, RPK does suggest that the idea of staying true or authentic to yourself is worth sustaining, which is not the same as narrowing your expression and musical tastes to rap:

> RPK: […] to keep it real means that your music is narrowed down to rap. You don't even have to go and say 90s rap but just rap and then you might listen to something like funk soul that's sampled in rap. Then you keep it real like "some fucking techno" or "I don't listen to heavy [metal] I can't do that I'm keeping shit real" like total total bull. [...] It's when the keep it real thing was relevant [...] it represented everything we didn't represent [...]. I've personally never had a keep it real attitude but. But what I said first about that attitude towards life [...] keep things real for yourself don't fool yourself like that's relevant I think if hip hop's keep it real contains that I think that's a good point and guideline that I too try to follow. You can fool everyone else but don't fool yourself […] that kind of hip hop authenticity or hip hop authenticity points are totally secondary.
>
> *RPK: […] se et sä keep it real ni se tarkottaa et se sun musa on rajattu siihen räppiin. Ei tarvii ees mennä siihen et ysäriräppiin mut räppiin ja sit sä voit kuunnella jotain funkkia soulia mitä on sämplätty räppiin. Sit sä keep it real silleen "mitä vitun teknoo" tai "minä en kuuntele heviä minä en pysty semmoseen mä pidän tän paskan aitona" silleen täysin täysin fuulaa. […] Se oli sillon ku keep it real läppä oli relevantti ni […] se edusti kaikkee muuta ku mitä me edustettiin […]. Mul ei oo semmost omakohtasta keep it real asennetta ollu koskaan mut. Mut se mitä mä sanoin eka se elämänasenne […] pidä homma aitona ittelles älä fuulaa ittees ni se on must ihan relevantti jos keep it real hiphopissa pitää sisällään semmost se on mun mielest ihan hyvä pointti ja elämän ohjenuora mitä mäki yritän seurata. Et sä voit kaikkii muit huijata mut älä ittees huijaa […] semmonen hiphop-aitous tai hiphop-aitous pisteet ni ihan toissijasii.*
>
> (Euro Crack i2015)

RPK explains that he and his crew were never interested in the keeping it real ideology in the 1990s, which he here associates with a narrow-minded attitude toward listening and making music. He makes it clear that this ideology is rather a thing of the past. The above quotation also interestingly addresses the connection

between sampling and authenticity (cf. Marshall 2006); RPK mentions the common tendency in hip hop to sample especially funk and other music genres that are commonly seen as part of the African American musical tradition, and then describes a "purist" stance where anything unrelated to hip hop and its history is dismissed due to this tradition whereas the "golden age rap" is revered. This view of keeping it real as relying on hip hop traditions is according RPK's argumentation an inauthentic approach to rap music. RPK also asserted that he is happy to "drop this whole rap shit" if some day he doesn't feel like making rap anymore, as he doesn't consider the ideology of hip hop realness as necessarily having anything to do with his actual passions or desires (Euro Crack i2015). Consequently, he also refuses to feel bad about his willingness to resign the ideology, as he argues that making rap simply for the sake of rap or for "hip hop authenticity points" is nonsense. Here, RPK constructs trying to live by the "keep it real" ideal as fake, much like Khid above. Realness in RPK's reasoning is a personal, inner attitude rather than a norm imposed by hip hop purists clinging to certain cultural-historical understandings of authenticity.

Interestingly, however, RPK (like Khid) alludes to himself as having subscribed at least to some of hip hop's norms when he was younger:

> RPK: And the fact is that the whole time that I make rap and release rap records I make ambient music I make dub techno and weird electronic music and everything that has nothing to do with hip hop. My habi[tus] contains, my being contains a lot of remnants from when I was a young hip hop boy but my life does not consist of hip hop. [laughs] I don't eat or shit it! Except when I'm in a rap song rapping.
>
> *RPK: Ja sit fakta on se et koko ajan ku mä teen räppiä ja julkasen räppilevyi ni mä teen ambient-musiikkia mä teen dubiteknoo ja häröelektronist musaa ja kaikkee mil ei oo mitään tekemist hiphopin kaa. Mun habi sisältää, mun olemus sisältää paljon jäänteitä siitä et mä oon nuori hiphop poika ollu mut ei mun elämä koostu hiphopista. [naurahtaa] Mä en syö tai pasko sitä! Paitsi sillon ku mä oon räppibiisissä, räppäämässä.*
>
> (Euro Crack i2015)

Here, RPK describes the eclecticism of his music making but also constructs his younger self as slightly different from the current one who, at least for the most part, does not "eat or shit" hip hop; his laughter portrays a fully-blown hip hop worldview and lifestyle as something rather ridiculous. RPK's description of himself as having very few limitations as an artist making music is quite consistent with his earlier assertions that construct hip hop's authenticity discourse as limiting the genre and

its development, in other words that because he does not allow the ideology to control him, he can be versatile. He mentions making music that draws from different genres of electronic music, but notably he does not mention soul, funk, or any of the genres traditionally attached to hip hop and preferred by the hip hop purists as RPK claimed in the previous extract. The extract above is consistent with the discussion in subchapter 4.3 about the artists' preference for alternative rap aesthetics, and constructs an image of RPK as an alternative rap producer who draws from genres that are not conventionally attached to rap music.

Also the recurrence of the stereotype about hip hop as a lifestyle affecting all areas of life (indicated here by the reference to bodily functions) is fascinating in the context of the authenticity discourse. As RPK then states, although somewhat as a joke, his artist persona may well appropriate exactly such a character, one that lives and breathes hip hop. Also, RPK specifically mentions "rap song" in his response instead of simply speaking of rapping which evokes the discourse on "rap-rap" discussed earlier; thus "rap-rap" would then potentially entail employing the ideological discourse on keeping it real. It also implicitly associates the rap-rap style with fakeness, and deep rap with real authenticity.

Relevant to the discussion above is the full-length verse RPK did for the song "Ilmestyksiä" ("Visions") by two Finnish rappers, Tommishock and Kalifornia-Keke, where he refers to himself as a veteran. I have included a part of that verse below:

Some kind of veteran
My repertoire speaks on its behalf
Legendary since cassettes were the thing boombox needed
Still standing therefore still relevant
Do-it-all attitude permanent constant
Still arrogant
I don't dance to trends
Fuck elegance
I do what I want not what the [inter]net desires
I represent an alternative not what this time admires

Jonninmoine veteraani
Puhuu sen puolest mun repertuaari
Legendaarist siitä asti ku c-kassut oli mitä mankka vaati
Edelleen pystyssä siks edelleen relevantti
Kaikkeen pystyvä elämänasenne pysyvä konstantti
Edelleen arrogantti
En tanssi trendin tahtiin

Fuck eleganssi
Teen mitä haluun en mitä netti vaatii
Edustan vaihtoehtoo en mitä tää aika vaalii

("Ilmestyksiä" ["Visions"], Tommishock & Kalifornia-Keke 2016)

To my knowledge, this is the first time RPK reflects on his ageing in a song in this manner. In his verse, besides establishing himself as "still relevant" by virtue of still making music, he also refers to his status as a "do-it-all," a producer and rapper. Working against the common notion of artistic deterioration that supposedly comes with ageing (see Forman 2014a; see Frith's example of Rolling Stones, Frith 1996: 58) and dealing with what Mangan (2013: 21) calls the challenge of "positive ageing," RPK here disassociates between ageing and irrelevance. He assumes authenticity by denying that he follows trends or other people's opinions, and thus positions himself as an "alternative" to today's successful artists. He also evokes the era of cassettes, which here serves mainly as a reference to the 1990s, but he also hints that this "old school" experience functions as a kind of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) because, like some other underground rappers in Finland, he still releases particularly instrumental versions of his albums on cassettes as limited editions.

I concur with Forman's (2014a) observation that hip hop is far from being solely the playground of youth. Like all of us, popular music artists age, and indeed, age should be acknowledged as a relevant social category alongside gender and race for example (as done in the works of for example Davis 2006; Forman 2010; 2014a; 2014b; Smith 2010; Fogarty 2012; Bennett 2013), and thus we should pay attention to the adult scenes also among consumers. Yet subcultures, which hip hop is often also labeled as, still tend to be perceived as youth cultures; sociologist Joanna Davis (in her study on ageing punks, 2006) suggests that using "scene" rather than subculture as a term helps to better grasp the fluidity of both the culture in question and the identity of the participants ageing with it. Further, Forman (2014: 304) speaks of "age representing" which "addresses temporality and generational status in hip-hop, adopting flexible conceptualizations of age and aging in order to either assert one's own status in the rap game or to diminish the status of others." Indeed, the discourse around authenticity and ageing brings forth new and relevant aspects about the changing hip hop culture. This is rather intriguing as during my interview with Euro Crack, Julma Henri also brought up how "young" hip hop culture still is, referring to the fact that it is just slightly over 40 years old. Nevertheless, age and ageing have become a relevant issue also in the Finnish scene.

In the next and final section of this chapter (6.2.3), I will summarize how the artists critically reshape the discourse around authenticity.

6.2.3 Dismantling the rules

As seen in previous chapters, the artists frequently speak of the importance of staying true to your own artistic ideas and vision. Also Khid spoke of this as one form of honesty or authenticity:

> INKA: […][I]s it important to be honest in rap?
> KHID: I don't think so. I think it's just a question of aesthetics like you can do something really honest but then again fantasy movies are not honest like under realism either. I think honesty just has to do with the cliché of doing what you like. But of course that's the storyteller's or the author's honesty. So in the end it can be really fascinating or it can be really boring. […] And I think it's perfectly allowed to be dishonest. If it somehow enhances how your vision comes true and how also the dishonesty serves the creation of art and how you want it to be. […] Everyday, like, the honesty between people is always respectable and I think, worth striving for. But let's say in art then I don't necessarily even care if the author has experienced the pain they talk about.
>
> *INKA: […][O]nks räpissä sit tärkeetä olla rehellinen?*
> *KHID: Ei mun mielest. Mun mielest se on kysymys vaan siit estetiikasta et sä voit tehä jotain tosi rehellist mut sit myös eihä fantasialeffatkaan ole rehellisiä tavallaan realismin alla. Mun mielest se rehellisyys liittyy enemmän vaan siihen että kliseisesti tekee sitä mistä ite tykkää. Mut tietty se on sen kertojan tai tekijän rehellisyys. Niin lopulta voi olla tosi kiehtovaa tai se voi olla tosi tylsää. […] Ja sit mun mielest se on ihan sallittua olla myös epärehellinen. Jos se jotenki edistää sitä et millä tavalla se sun visio toteutuu ja miten se palvelee myös se epärehellisyys sitä taiteen syntymistä ja millaseks sä haluat sen tehdä. […] Arki, niinku, ihmisten välinen rehellisyys on aina arvostettavaa ja mun mielest se, siihen kuuluu pyrkiä. Mut vaikka taiteessa ni ei mua välttämät kiinnosta edes se että onko se tekijä kokenut sen kivun josta se puhuu.*
>
> (Khid i2015)

Similarly to Ameeba, Khid noted that the artist's honesty can result in being either exciting or boring; in art, honesty does not matter in a similar way as honesty between two individuals. Khid here stresses the possible aesthetic importance of dishonesty as a way to bring a fantasy world into life through art. Accordingly, authenticity is about staying true to yourself and your own ideas, which does not exclude telling fictional stories through music. In fact, telling fictional stories, if this enhances the artist's "true" vision, can be a form of authenticity. Khid's logic is consistent with how the artists construct views on artistic autonomy (see subchapter 6.1).

As discussed above, the artists express feelings of irritation towards and even argue for the irrelevance of the ideological notion of authenticity due to the restrictions which following such a norm would impose on their craft. Considering that a local adaptation of US style gangsta rap which describes and often glorifies a criminal lifestyle has been conspicuously absent from the Finnish rap scene, despite this style of rap having traveled to and having been indigenized in many other countries, we may wonder to which extent the artists in my study are constructing authenticity as irrelevant because they link it with a notion of ghettocentric US gangsta rap, and its connection to discourse on authenticity (Perkins 1996: 20; Ogbar 2007: 6; see also Julma Henri's reference to hardcore rap group Mobb Deep above) and the *disconnection* of that particular style with Finnish rap.

As Ogbar (2007: 43) notes, in the US, "rappers who extol ghettoized pathology (drug selling, gang banging, violence, pimping, etc.) affirm their realness. All other groups [...] must conform to the standards established by this group." Similarly Rose (2008: 139) asserts that "stories of black street culture […] are at the heart of 'keeping it real' rhetoric" (cf. also Jeffries 2011: 75). Ogbar (2007: 43) further states that gangsta rappers and so-called conscious artists both operate within this framework and thus complicate the notion of realness although its connection with an idea of "thug life" is clear. This certainly resonates with the idea I borrow from Fabbri (1981) of authenticity as a hyper rule that dictates several (if not all) other aspects of the genre. The close association of the keeping it real idea with black socio-economic experiences also affirms a certain cultural distance experienced by Finnish rappers. As mentioned, there are however some parodic gangsta rap artists in Finland, such as Khid's DJ Kridlokk, the rap group KC/MC Mafia, and Eevil Stöö, which have very little in common with US gangsta rap.

To summarize this subchapter, the four rappers reject the *ideology* of authenticity in hip hop, which becomes synonymous with fake authenticity, but staying true to oneself is clearly meaningful for them. Khid constructs keeping it real or authenticity as a "rule book," a set of norms dictated from the outside which mainly restrict a person and their self-expression as well as potentially contradicting their own values. Blindly following the ideology becomes a type of fakeness which, however, may instead be perceived positive by someone wishing to belong to hip hop culture, where "eating and shitting hip hop" is the norm, and something also Khid says his teenage self enjoyed. At the same time, this argument implicitly constructs the keeping it real ideology as the terrain of adolescents, or people who are perhaps not mature enough to think for themselves. Interestingly, Khid uses atheism metaphorically to describe himself as someone who does not subscribe to hip hop ideologies and constructs authenticity as a sort of religion for hip hop. In this way, he also creates a normative value judgement where following the ideology of authenticity becomes indoctrination whereas non-conformity becomes the critical,

more intellectual choice. A similar style of argumentation and rejecting the "catch phrase" of keeping it real was also recognized by Jeffries (2011: 137) as manifesting among hip hop listeners in the US.

RPK clearly differentiates between the ideology of "keeping it real" and the idea of staying true to yourself (see also Jeffries 2011: 138). While doing this, RPK utilizes the discourse on age and ageing in multiple ways. Through the interview examples, it becomes evident that RPK's knowledge and experience as a rapper and producer affect the way in which he constructs his arguments about the different generations of hiphoppers and hip hop. Authenticity is not about listening to old school rap and saying you're "keeping it real": rather, realness is a personal mindset.

The idea of authenticity is contingent on a binary idea of something being authentic and something being inauthentic (McLeod 1999; Marshall 2001; Jeffries 2011; Speers 2014; cf. Frith 1996: 43; cf. Anttonen 2017a: 29), inauthenticity in this case equaling following "the rules," or, as also discussed in the previous part of this chapter, succumbing to industry and/or audience demands. Artists need the authenticity discourse to be able to perform authenticity; authenticity discourse and artist identities are always dependent on previous evocations of these although being highly malleable (cf. Pennycook 2007: 77). The artists in my study critique, challenge, and even reject the cultural-historical authenticity as ideological, but use and construct personal-experiential authenticity. The rappers construct the idea that we should not follow the (cultural-historical) ideology of authenticity supposedly dictated by others but rather, stay true to ourselves, and thus, real. As my analysis above aims to show, it appears that the artists are trying to discursively dismantle the hierarchical position that authenticity as a "hyperrule" possesses in hip hop culture and the kinds of norms this imposes on practitioners. The questions discussed in this chapter are by no means unique to the Finnish underground rap scene, and have been discussed previously for example by Speers (2014), Oravcová (2013), and McLeod (1999). Hence, it is possible to argue that there are similarities between underground hip hop scenes across time and space.

7 Discussion and conclusion

This work has provided a case study analysis on how the discourses around authenticity, spirituality, and atheism are constructed in the Finnish rap underground, more specifically how they manifest in the expression of four rap artists, Ameeba, Khid, Julma Henri, and RPK. In particular, this study has described the principal features of the spiritual/atheistic worldviews that the artists construct (in interviews, lyrics, musically, and audiovisually), and how the artists connect these spiritual/atheistic worldviews with the discourse on authenticity. Additionally, this study has focused on how these artists describe and define "underground" as an artistic identity and alternative musical aesthetic and connect it with their aesthetic preferences and artist personas. Finally, the study has outlined how the artists construct the discourse(s) on authenticity in relation to hip hop culture, the Finnish music industry, and their audience.

In this final chapter, I outline the central results of this study (subchapters 7.1 and 7.2), and expand the discussion regarding hip hop masculinity (subchapter 7.3) before offering suggestions for further studies (subchapter 7.4.) and a conclusion (subchapter 7.5).

7.1 Spirituality and atheism as cultural resources

In many ways, the present study has been an attempt at "rethinking the religious" in hip hop (cf. Miller 2013: 2), addressing new spirituality and atheism as multifaceted worldviews and cultural resources in hip hop. While several academic studies and popular articles have been written on hip hop and religion, recently for example regarding the Christian symbolism of mainstream US artists such as Kendrick Lamar (e.g. Bassil 2017) or Jay-Z (Dyson 2015; Utley 2012), or of Finnish pop rappers Cheek and Elastinen (Seppänen 2017), little attention has been afforded to new spirituality, New Age, or atheism in rap so far. This study has thus introduced new approaches and themes into the study of hip hop by demonstrating that post-Christian Western worldviews with syncretistic and pluralistic religious and atheistic ideas are reflected in many different ways in contemporary Finnish underground rap. This study has built on a premise based on religious studies theories where such worldviews are seen as part of a historical development in Western societies during

recent decades towards both self-spirituality and secularity. More specifically, this study has aimed to demonstrate that these tendencies also manifest in the context of contemporary hip hop in the localized form of Finnish underground rap.

A central finding was the seeming lack of coherence of the artists' worldviews. The artists, Ameeba, Khid, and Julma Henri (with RPK in Euro Crack) are quite non-specific in describing their worldviews and what kinds of ideas manifest in their music, offering individualistic and somewhat syncretistic accounts instead. Equally, their lyrics offer a variety of ideas seemingly drawing from multiple sources, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and New Age. During my research, I began to notice that as researchers, we perhaps tend to overestimate the coherence of people's worldviews, attempting to categorize them in an either-or fashion as Christians, Buddhists etc. based on perceived evidence of their interests and beliefs. The common human tendency to assume and develop clear-cut categorizations for all things, including religiosity and identities, has seemingly not yet evolved sufficiently into considering the developments that characterize contemporary worldviews; these developments include the "subjective turn" where individuals' religious worldview is based on personal needs and beliefs rather than dogma and institutions (Partridge 2004; Heelas & Woodhead 2005), and the "relaxation of sacred" (Taira 2006; Moberg et al. 2012; Pasquale & Kosmin 2013) where the boundaries between religious and secular have become fluid. For example Monica Miller (2009: 45) higlights that there are several "competing religious expressions" in rap music as well as "religious incoherence" in the songs, a fact which demands the researcher to embrace the shifting nature of rap expression and reality more generally. Neat categories are no longer – and have perhaps never been – an adequate way of explicating religious worldviews and their variation; religions function more and more as cultural resources, and do not necessarily assume believing nor belonging (Taira 2006: 55–56), hence individuals' worldviews can indeed appear rather messy, often containing a mixture of secular and spiritual ideas. While the artists' worldviews contain aspects of rather widely popular spiritual and atheist trends, their individualistic and hence seemingly unique combination might be considered as being "on the fringes" of mainstream and underground views, to borrow Speers's (2014: 120) term for underground rap.

It seems the artists are using religion and atheism rather freely as resources that can be combined with a multitude of other ideas (cf. Taira 2006: 23, 55–56, 211), befitting the framework of Western post-Christianity with its focus on individual needs and beliefs drawing from different sources and traditions. While this study's findings can be considered to align with religious studies theories about the current Western religious landscape, it seems necessary to stress that we must continue to rethink how we estimate and define religiousity or atheism today, and to further theorize how the boundaries between secular and religious thought are blurred (cf.

Frisk & Nynäs 2012: 51; Taira 2006). Further, as regards the study of hip hop and religion, Miller (2009: 53) points out that "[t]he creativity and ingenuity whereby hip hop 'flips the script' of many traditional religious and theological meanings makes the religious exploration of hip hop culture more difficult"; a central facet of hip hop expression is to question and confuse our everyday understandings about religion and other socio-cultural ideas and phenomena, hence searching only for neat and unambiguous references to these ideas suggests a limited understanding of hip hop as an art form.

Nevertheless, some central features of the artists' worldviews emerged through analyzing the research material. Ameeba's music or eco rap features several ideas pertaining to ecological awareness, and contains spiritual tendencies reminiscent of New Age environmentalism with its concern for the well-being of individuals as well as the planet as a whole, speaking of various levels of consciousness and development conducting us towards a potentially apocalyptic change. Ameeba's songs additionally allude to many instances of personal thought and learning processes and experiences which fit the "self-spirituality" of contemporary alternative spirituality. Ameeba also expresses pluralism, the belief that all religions share a core truth and can be considered equally valid although different ways of viewing the world. Ameeba and also Julma Henri appear to construct pluralistic thinking and dedifferentiation, in other words focus on what unites humanity rather than what separates it, which is common in contemporary forms of spirituality on a wider scale. Audiovisually, these discourses are constructed in Ameeba's expression through natural landscapes and electronic, ambient soundscapes, and localized through images of Finnish nature. Indeed, whereas Euro Crack and Khid utilize more traditional US hip hop imagery both visually and sonically, my close reading of Ameeba's "Vanhasielu" ("Old Soul," Ameeba 2014b) video reveals a world drawing more from Nordic musical expression with its close relationship to the environment (cf. Torvinen & Välimäki 2019).

Like Ameeba, Julma Henri exhibits pluralistic and non-dualistic thinking which has occurred across religions before, but particularly in Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. These were also the strongest influences in Julma Henri's music, as he explicated in interviews and as the lyrical analysis in this study showed. In Julma Henri's lyrics, oneness, the idea of fundamental non-duality of all existence, was connected with a narrative about moving away from a false ego towards one's "true" self and an enlightened consciousness. These non-dual religious ideas manifest also audiovisually in the music video for "Kräkkäkränkkä" (Euro Crack 2013c): the Euro Crack duo, Julma Henri and RPK, call their music "consciousness dealing" and "a drug" which opens a whole range of discourses that relate to rap aesthetics and spirituality, but also to hip hop's connections with societal histories and policies regarding drugs, and to popular music's connections with various

substances causing altered states of mind. In the case of Euro Crack, many music videos are "blinking," colours are mutated or images are blurred, paused, or otherwise manipulated using technology which contributes to a "futuristic" feeling and simulates the effect of being under the influence of mind-altering substances, changing the viewer's spiritual understanding. Further, the transgression implied by the highly addictive crack cocaine in the name and music of Euro Crack also suggests that their music is alternative and underground, not intended for mainstream.

In contrast to the other artists' spiritual worldviews, Khid explicitly asserted having an atheistic worldview. Khid's atheism seemingly draws from scientific atheism with its rejection of any supernatural entities. For Khid, authenticity in music making is attached to his own atheistic wordview, and more generally, he considers that the evolution in his worldview should reflect in his music. Interestingly, Khid also applies atheism on a more metaphorical level for challenging hip hop's authenticity ideology, particularly its hypermasculine norms; being an atheist became equated with critical thinking about hip hop's norms. In the "Luoti" ("Bullet," Khid x RPK 2014b) video, this was done audiovisually through an appropriation of gangsta rap's masculine, drug- and violence-ridden culture; the sonic and visual guns and bullets functioned as a symbolic critique of hip hop's pervasive misogynistic and violent hypermasculinity. According to my reading of the video, which was inspired by my interviews with Khid, these metaphors are used to construct an atheistic stance towards such hip hop norms, suggesting that by eliminating the rap ego, rappers can be free to create individual and thus authentic music.

In terms of rap aesthetics, sharing philosophical ideas and worldviews in rap was conceptualized by the artists through the discourse on deep rap and its perceived opposite, rap-rap. Deep rap appears closely connected with spiritual, more introspective lyrics and more ambient sounds. Indeed, spirituality could be considered as a loose term characterizing the sounds and/or lyrics of the artists and the form of underground rap they make. Accordingly, the rappers admit being drawn to "weird," "ethereal," and "gloomy" sounds which evoke spiritual discourses due to their cultural connection to minimalist electronic music genres such as ambient and dub techno. Rap-rap, in turn, is "rapping about rapping"; the style consists of narrations of rap culture, features little to no philosophical content, and focuses on a braggadocious and seemingly hypermasculine expression. Rap-rap also seems to require less emotional input than deeper rap. While rap-rap was discursively constructed as the opposite of deep rap, Euro Crack asserted that their music mixes the two styles. Interestingly, RPK also suggested that deeper content has to an extent become a standard in Finnish underground rap, hence rap-rap or rapping about rapping can be an alternative form of rap.

Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2007: 144) argues that "music cannot be separated from the social, political or cultural context from which it develops"; in the case of the kind of conscious rap which this study has focused on, those conditions were framed as Western post-Christian worldviews and hip hop's pervasive, often ideological authenticity. Although the pick-and-mix phenomenon present in current religiosity (Parsons 1993: 296–298; Roof et al. eds. 1995; Taira 2006: 72–76) seemingly also characterizes the worldviews of the artists, rendering those views non-specific to any one denomination despite having certain aforementioned emphases, the artists have grown up and operate within Finland, a predominantly (Evangelical Lutheran) Christian country. Thus, it is not very surprising that Christianity and Christian concepts, but also other aspects of Finnish culture, such as national-romantic folklore, came up in interviews and lyrics.

The idea connecting the rappers was that a worldview should ideally be an individual choice emanating from personal experience rather than from collective ideas or ideologies. This kind of individuality was also a central trait of the way the artists construct underground identities and authenticity.

7.2 (Re)defining underground and authenticity

The four artists of this study can be said to represent underground rap in several ways. In interviews, underground was defined by the artists as an identity, aesthetic, and an attitude. As an identity, the underground rappers assume artist personas that defy mainstream expectations in terms image, content, and aesthetics. Regarding aesthetics, the artists draw from more marginal electronic and urban music genres such as ambient, dub techno, and grime, which often feature somber sounds reflecting urban melancholia and criticism towards the current state of society, thus defying perceived pop standards of joyful and melodic tunes. I argued that turning towards electronic music and more marginal genres can be considered one key element of alternative rap, distinguishing it from commercial pop rap or more old school forms of rap. As an attitude, the artists all exhibited the idea that "[t]he importance of expressing individual style [...] is perhaps the defining factor of the hip-hop generation, 'commercial' or 'underground.'" (D'Errico 2011: 17.) It seems that a common way to deal with categorizations in the underground is to want to complicate them, or at least to construct this idea of individuality mentioned by d'Errico. For the four rappers in this study, underground music making seems to entail an independent approach to music making with little to no attention to outside demands made by music industry or the listening audience. The rappers seem to draw pleasure from music that they consider as defying conventionally understood beauty, and thus such music appears as liberating and unconfined as it breaks conventions.

Through representations of alternative religious and politically leftist views, the artists in this study arguably also offer "voices from the margins" (Rose 1994), despite being white males and thus representing a privileged demographic; their underground music can be seen as a form of cultural resistance (cf. Rose 1994: 19) that speaks critically of capitalism, exploitation of nature and humans, and of their destructive consequences. As Moberg and Partridge (2017: 8) state, "popular music discourses and cultures are typically transgressive and, as such, politically significant," underscoring the affective impact of popular music containing a potential for social change. Also the music made by the four rappers arguably aims at social and cultural change, be it towards a more ecologically sustainable lifestyle within society (Ameeba), more equal opportunities for artists in the music industry (Julma Henri, RPK), or a more feminist and inclusive approach in rap (Khid).

Further, as evidenced by the music video analysis, the suggestion that "death is life" is a recurring trope in the audiovisual expression of the study's artists. This also connects their worldviews and underground rap aesthetics: whereas Euro Crack's somber "crack" music hints that underground rap and mental surrendering as a form of death is a path towards enlightened minds as well as better life (and better music), Ameeba's eco rap signals towards the seemingly endless yet ultimately liberating cycle of reincarnation, and Khid's grime influenced rap offers release from (mainstream) rap's constrictions through death of the rap ego. Death, then, becomes an overarching metaphor and a discursive terrain pointing towards underground rap's aesthetics as discursively connected to or even contingent on more mainstream expressions: underground artists in various ways signal that they are creating new underground musical expressions, new life, via the death of previous, supposedly more conventional styles and beliefs. In the case of this study's artists, these "new" underground styles breaking conventions include electronic musical influences and the aestheticization of non-dualism, environmentalism, and atheism. Consequently, this study (like many others before it) concludes that "underground" as a theoretical concept and discourse points to an interdependent relationship between alternative and mainstream expressions.

In addition to worldviews, authenticity has been the second most prevalent theme in this study. Like in many studies before the present one, it became clear that authenticity is contingent on a view where something is or is not authentic. In the course of my work, I created a new binary theoretical model for analyzing authenticity discourse in hip hop, consisting of cultural-historical and personal-experiential arguments on hip hop authenticity. The former consists of arguments which presume that the artist establishes continuity between their own expression and hip hop tradition whereas the latter contains arguments about artists following their own artistic vision based on their personal views and experiences. The artists in this study claimed that they make exactly the kind of music they want to make,

without significant outside influences from the music industry or audience; the music unabashedly follows their own vision, be it in-your-face rap-rap or socially conscious deep rap or a mixture of the two, and thus their music is the "realest" or most authentic possible for them.

More generally, the artists are clearly cognizant of hip hop's authenticity discourse as well as the overall cultural value and emphasis given to honesty and sincerity in social relationships. The artists critique, challenge, and even reject particularly the cultural-historical authenticity, perceiving it as an ideological and artistically restrictive trope. This perceived ideological form of authenticity was suggested to force artists to follow hip hop's genre conventions too tightly, and to suppress artistic innovation. The ideology of authenticity or "keeping it real" became defined as consisting of historical, even outdated views on authenticity which are dictated by others. The artists also considered that many advocates of the authenticity ideology adopt it directly from US hip hop culture, which makes it even more unsuitable for the local Finnish context. Instead, "real" authenticity equals staying true to yourself, following your own views, and basing music on your own personal experiences. The rappers attempt to discursively dismantle authenticity as a "hyperrule" in hip hop culture and the kinds of norms this imposes on practitioners. An exception to this rule appears to be the rap-rap subgenre which the artists construct; as RPK mentioned, in a rap-rap song, the cultural-historical norms and tropes of hip hop are used to create boastful content and delivery.

For the most part, however, the artists use personal-experiential authenticity as a discursive strategy to authenticate their own expression, artist persona, and arguments. The artists all also claimed that the spiritual/atheistic lyrics had to do with their personal views and interests; having these themes in their music is a sign of authenticity for them. In this way, the discourse on authenticity seems to connect the spiritual/atheistic content of the music with artistic integrity and individuality. This is also well suited to the spiritual and atheistic worldviews characterized by individualism; personal-experiential authenticity is based on following an individual artistic vision instead of tradition, and similarly contemporary worldviews are often based on personal beliefs and needs. I am keen to hypothesize that rap artists with more community oriented religious worldviews are more prone to raise cultural-historical arguments regarding authenticity than artists with more individualistic worldviews, such as the rappers in this study. The present study lacks sufficient data for exploring this possible correlation, but further studies examining worldviews and authenticity in hip hop could offer fruitful analyses on the matter.

Although art for art's sake was an idea evoked by the rappers, suggesting that records sales are irrelevant for determining the worth of music, the artists also challenge the idea of success as "selling out." While accentuating their underground style of music making in terms of production and aesthetics, hence assuming their

music will likely not reach pop radio, they were unanimous about considering their potential success as an organic result of their sincerity in music making. Sincerity in this case entailed not following other people's opinions, and not compromising aesthetics in order to reach the charts or to achieve more radio airplay. The rappers also clearly attempt to undermine the power of the music industry over their music by constructing autonomous underground identities, and thus authenticity; as Murray Forman (2010: 73) notes, "authenticity in hip-hop is associated with a focused critical perspective and the unyielding articulation of themes of resistance." Similarly, underground artists continue to resist mainstream values and norms through their expression.

Authenticity as sincerity or honesty was also discussed in relation to performance personae, or artist personas. While the artists highlight the sincerity of their music, they also have several artist personas or aliases; the different personas facilitate varying their expression and storytelling, allowing exaggeration and play with different themes and characters, yet at the same time the artist persona evolves with the "real" person behind the art. The complex negotiation between various roles suggests that although artists construct clearly fabricated artist personas, they also consider their music to be a medium for venting their ideas and emotions, which can be therapeutic, and they actively reflect on how and to what extent they reveal their private thoughts and experiences in their music. Hip hop authenticity thus seems to entail some amount of autobiographical music, like for example Ameeba and Julma Henri suggested by comparing their music to "an open book" and "diary," respectively. The artists also attempt to maintain some perceived consistency in their artistic expression and artist persona(s); for example Khid asserted that his other artist persona DJ Kridlokk's gangster parody music is different from Khid's, and similarly the music of Julma Henri's alias Julma H was slightly more mainstream oriented than Julma Henri's.

The discourse around ageing and authenticity brought new and relevant aspects about changing hip hop culture to the surface. Julma Henri and RPK spoke of a "keeping it real" ideology and located it as a part of the 1990s' hip hop culture, associating it with a juvenile and narrow-minded attitude toward listening and making music. Similarly, Khid suggested that hip hop authenticity functions much like a religion and is more prevalent among teenagers, making it a childish notion which he as a "hip hop atheist" cannot relate to. However, age-based argumentation was also used by RPK as a way of establishing himself as an authentic and relevant veteran artist whose experience-based authority is not available to younger artists. It appears hip hop authenticity means different things to rappers of different ages and career stages.

7.3 Worldviews and hip hop masculinities

A study such as the present one which focuses on male rap artists cannot leave the theme of masculinity unaddressed. My focus has been on discourses throughout this study, and popular music is a heavily gendered discourse indeed (e.g. Walser 1993; Whiteley 2000; McClary 2002; Rose 2008; Hawkins ed. 2017). The theme of masculinity and gender has received fairly little attention in my work overall, being more implicit than explicit, which can be considered one of its shortcomings. Some remarks were made particularly during close reading of the three music videos in chapter 5 about Euro Crack's and Khid's gangsta masculine tropes and about Ameeba as a male wanderer in the North. Also the rap-rap and deep rap aesthetics discussed in chapter 4 are related to masculinity; the former constructs an idea of braggadocious and "hard" delivery following rap's masculine standards, whereas the latter was constructed as a form of music which is able to "move" the listener, featuring more philosophical, introspective, emotional, vulnerable and thus, considered from a socio-cultural point of view, seemingly "feminine" content. Indeed, as authenticity "is consistently aligned with [...] masculinity," (Oakes 2009: 232) the study's artists' attempts to deconstruct hegemonic hip hop hypermasculinity through their music can be seen to challenge the genre's historical notions of authenticity as a predominantly male quality which includes emotional "hardness" (cf. McLeod 1999). The spiritual and atheistic traits in the music of the artists broaden masculinity in hip hop as they allow the artists to embrace emotions which are attached to worldviews.

The rappers in this study portray a variety of masculinities which both sustain and contradict the kind of hip hop masculinity centering aggressive, heterosexual, and often sexist and misogynistic expressions. Julma Henri's raps are perhaps the most aggressive and violent out of the artists, considering particularly his earlier releases which also feature misogynistic language (Julma Henri & Syrjäytyneet 2007; 2008). However, his more recent songs, such as "Anna Lilja" ("Hand a Lily," Euro Crack 2013a) and "Jalokiveni" ("My Jewel," Julma H 2016a), have portrayed a more sensitive Julma Henri who raps about his love for his longtime partner and his daughter. This kind of vulnerability is still rather rare in rap music, both in Finland and elsewhere. The other half of Euro Crack, RPK, and his rap-rap braggadocio utilizes traditional masculinity tropes to establish a "hardcore" rap aesthetic, whereas his "deep rap" with its philosophical ideas complicates this image. Khid may be considered as the closest to more contemporary rap masculinity with his detached coolness. He rarely if ever displays emotion through his delivery or lyrics, which, as I argued in the introduction, renders him in a certain way the millennials' voice in the midst of precarity, avoiding attachment to work or relationships as a response to how today's society avoids creating sustainable futures for its younger generations. Yet, Khid has not only criticized hip hop's toxic

hypermasculinity and sexist tropes in his music by making use of such tropes himself, as seen in the close reading of "Luoti" video in subchapter 5.3, but he has also publicly called himself a feminist.

A trait Khid and Ameeba share is that they almost never address women or sexuality in their music, thus effectively avoiding a kind of rap masculinity built on heterosexuality and sexism and accomplishing narratives which appear more universal and non-gendered despite the two artists' position as males in a male dominated genre. While representing the demographic of (white) male rap artists, Ameeba has arguably succeeded in offering music which according to my observations also speaks to many women. When attending his concerts for participant observation purposes (and also later), I frequently noticed his audience to feature more women than many other male rappers' – and several of those women clearly knew his songs, reciting the lyrics word for word. It appears that Ameeba successfully bends the boundaries of traditional rap masculinity, as he often describes feelings, emotions, and experiences which are framed as real, constructing a type of authenticity historically associated with Romanticism. He speaks of disappointment, pain, and sorrow in ways that more normative and aggressive versions of hip hop masculinity would translate into anger, hate, and violence. A great example is the song "Miehuuskoe" ("Test of manhood," Ameeba 2015c) where Ameeba raps that "it's manly to admit your weakness and allow yourself to cry" ("on miehuutta myöntää heikkoutensa ja antaa ittensä itkee"). This arguably renders Ameeba's narratives more universal and relatable to a wider audience than restrictive and, at times, toxically masculine rap lyrics, as the content is not explicitly from a male perspective. While vulnerability and nostalgia are key features of country music's white masculinity and authenticity (Askerøi 2017: 74), for example, I argue that they are much less present in (Finnish) rap. Ameeba's "deep rap" could thus be considered as more inclusive of a range of people across the gender spectrum and hence accessible to those who have trouble relating to hypermasculine rap. Further, the worldview Ameeba constructs draws from New Age ideas; recent New Age and alternative spiritualities more generally have also featured several strands dedicated to female empowerment or feminine forms of worship (see Hanegraaf 1996; Hunt 2003; Aune et al. eds. 2008; Sutcliffe et al. eds. 2013).

Clearly, there are multiple ways to deconstruct and create complicated masculinities in rap, and the artists in this study offer some of them, challenging narrow and even toxic hypermasculine norms within hip hop culture.

7.4 Further possibilities

Perhaps the most obvious exclusions considering the focus on contemporary spirituality of this study are Finnish rap artists Olpekkalev and J Riskit who have

also collaborated with Ameeba and RPK and share similarities in style and content with their electronic and ambient sounds and lyrics about individual syncretic spirituality. I decided against expanding my study, however, for mainly two reasons: on the one hand, I wanted to conduct a deeper analysis of the four artists chosen in this study, and secondly, the chosen four artists have a longer and more multifaceted history of collaboration with one another as well as longer personal careers in comparison to Olpekkalev or J Riskit. Neither Olpekkalev nor J Riskit have released full-length albums, nor have they performed together with the four artists in this study as often as those four have amongst themselves. The Eastern and pagan religious influences of female rappers Lehmä and Marleena Arianna would have also been thematically suitable for this work, however they are rather implicit in comparison to the artists in this study. In the latter stages of this research, I was also tempted to include the Finnish Muslim rapper Pijall, who converted in the early 2010s, and has collaborated closely with RPK since the 1990s and later also with Ameeba. However, contemporary Islam offers a very rich arena of inquiry, the inclusion of which I knew (as I have written on the subject in the past, see Rantakallio 2013; Poutiainen & Rantakallio 2016) would make it difficult to keep the present study coherent. I have thus attempted to address the overall religious landscape of Finnish rap elsewhere (Rantakallio 2019).

The present study has focused on male artists, as so many hip hop studies before it. While there are academic studies on women and non-binary hip hop artists, to my knowledge, there are very few on women's perceptions of authenticity or spirituality in hip hop (see however Guillory 2015; Rantakallio 2013; 2019). Several of these existing studies are still confined to exploring mainly women's status as the gendered and sexualized Other instead of delving deeper into their worldviews and perceptions as creative agents. It seems imperative to do more research on women and non-binary artists which does not focus solely on their status as gender minority in hip hop, or how they act as a (sexualized) counterpart to male artists, but on their creative agency, art, and their aspirations.

Also an important theme which was touched upon only in passing in this study was parody and humor in rap. Indeed, these elements have always been central in hip hop, starting from the merry party raps of the late 1970s and early 1980s of such artists as the Sugarhill Gang, or in Finland, Finnish humor rap of late 1980s and early 1990s, yet humor has received very little attention in hip hop studies. Moreover, memes and internet trolls have become a significant part of the larger global digitalized popular culture. This manifests also in the fairly new market of so-called SoundCloud rap, a generation of independent rap artists operating and finding success outside of large record labels by producing music using their home studios or smart phones and placing it in music streaming service(s) (Teffer 2018; cf. also Hesmondhalgh et al. forthcoming 2019). Exploring humor and its connections to

contemporary youth culture, which to a significant extent is based on online interactions and social media, might open several new research avenues not only considering how trends in hip hop culture are formed, but also how popular culture more generally has moved to and is birthed by social media. Analyzing the larger SoundCloud rap phenomenon would also yield more information about contemporary underground rap music in terms of production, style, and content considering for example the subgenre of emorap, but also about an internet-bred subculture resisting music industry structures and its arguably outdated operative logic. Further, the larger theme of Internet and social media in contemporary rap music merits investigation and was addressed only briefly in this work.

Additionally, we may ask to which extent can rap sounds be argued to express "religiousness," or be considered spiritual. Due to lack of space, this study has only begun addressing these themes. Perhaps the most obvious shortcoming of this work has been the lack of more systematic and detailed musicological analysis of the music made by the four artists. My focus regarding discourses has been more on language, particularly interviews and lyrics, and visuals more than on the formal qualities of music. Much remains to be explored of the relationship between rap music's sonic aspects and religion.

7.5 Conclusion

A few years ago, I was faced with an interesting question posed by media studies and hip hop scholar Murray Forman at an undergraduate seminar: what are we doing for hip hop culture to make it stronger? It struck me that, according to their own words, the Finnish undergraduates who were presenting their work at that seminar didn't consider themselves as doing anything for hip hop and appeared baffled about the question. The identity of hip hop studies is clearly different in the US than in Finland where people do not (yet) see scholarly input or writing in general as one "element" of hip hop, although writing about hip hop can and maybe should be seen as such: language constructs the culture as well. My aim with this study has been partially to reinforce this latter idea, and I hope that I have succeeded in contributing to the writing and documentation of Finnish hip hop's history, and also to hip hop scholarship at large. Further, as a member of the hip hop community and as a performer, my personal stake has been to continue writing out our history and legacy.

Most notably, this study has aimed to produce new knowledge through acknowledging and critically analyzing hip hop's connection(s) with post-Christian worldviews, particularly new spirituality and atheism, but also through investigating the pervasive discourse around musical authenticity. This work has combined theories and methods from the fields of popular musicology, religious studies, and hip hop studies, thus expanding interdisciplinary understanding of contemporary rap

music. Furthermore, while focusing on the specific case of Finnish underground rap, this study has also advanced more general theoretical understanding about authenticity in music, particularly through developing and applying a binary theoretical model of cultural-historical and personal-experiential authenticity for analyzing hip hop, but which could be further developed and utilized in the analysis of other music genres. Moreover, this study has combined the themes of alternative spirituality and atheism in an unprecedented way, as it was argued that both developments (towards religiosity/secularity) not only occur simultaneously in the West, but also share similarities in terms of historical origins and in terms of their focus on individual needs and authority. Further studies can benefit from these theoretical syntheses and their applications when researching authenticity in popular music and/or contemporary religious developments such as post-Christianity.

While authenticity has been a key theme in this work, and remains a pervasive discourse within the Finnish and global hip hop scene, it has been a prevalent object of analysis in numerous studies among cultural studies and popular music studies (see Speers 2014; Anttonen 2017a; Moore 2002; McLeod 1999), some authors claiming it to be one of the central characteristics of particularly Western culture. Although sometimes seemingly irritating the artists of this study in its perceived ideological forms, authenticity still clearly matters in popular music, and remains central to popular music discourses and understandings. In addition to popular music, authenticity is also significant for many people from a psychological perspective; today, a large portion of self-help and new spiritual literature is dedicated to helping people lead "an authentic" and rewarding life (cf. also Speers 2014: 233). The important observation below by religious studies scholar Michael York (2004: 311) pertains to the context of new spirituality:

> An even wider and more diffuse group than either the core believer or the spiritual seeker consists of those who are looking for themselves. For these people, authenticity is central. While they experience the alternative expressions of human potential, their main concern is to be themselves, to be whoever they authentically are. In other words, the pursuit of the experiential is considered to be the most authentic activity […].

To which extent the artists in this study are aware of this prevalent idea(l) in new spiritual thinking remains an unanswered question. Nevertheless, it is clear that the rappers exhibit similar arguments as regards their own music making and to which extent it reflects their "authentic" values and views. The continued appreciation and fascination placed on the idea of authenticity suggest that authenticity is a key value in society, and will remain relevant in the future.

This study has focused on rap music which is also part of the larger category of popular culture. A central argument made in this study has been that, like other forms of popular culture, rap influences people's ideas about religion:

> One might [...] argue that people's knowledge and views of institutional forms of religion, and indeed of the very category of religion as such, is ever more often derived from representations and narratives found in mass-mediated popular culture. Popular culture must therefore be viewed as constituting an important area of investigation when aiming to make sense of how contemporary religion is experienced, practiced, and lived. (Moberg & Granholm 2012: 105.)

I thus wish to conclude that continuing to investigate the connections between popular culture and worldviews remains a central task for researchers who hope to gain information about how people express and view religions and other worldviews. While popular culture contains an element of fantasy and exaggeration, it is never far removed from societal, lived realities, the context within which popular cultural items are created and consumed. Hence, also rap music and hip hop culture at large will likely continue to comment on and contribute to our ideas, values, and beliefs about the ontological and epistemological premises of the world and universe we inhabit.

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Appendices

All lyrics below have been provided directly or checked for errors by the artists. Translation into English by author.

APPENDIX 1: Cue sheet “Kräkkäkränkkä”

Time	**Lyrics (original)**	**Lyrics (translation)**	**Music**	**Visuals**
00:00–00:25 Refrain B 16 bars	Bars 1–8 *Ku eurocrack on täällä* *Ei riitä et oot tässä* *Sun pitää kässää* *Sun pitää olla läsnä* *Kräkkää tää kräkkää tää kräkkää* *Kräkkää tää kräkkää tää kräkkää* Bars 9–16 *Ku eurocrack on päässä* *Ei riitä et se on päässä* *Se pitää ulos päästää* *Se pitää ulos bläästää* *Kränkkää tää kränkkää tää kränkkää* *Kränkkää tää kränkkää tää kränkkää*	Bars 1–8 When Euro Crack is here It’s not enough that you are here You have to understand, You have to be present Crack this crack this crack Crack this crack this crack Bars 9–16 When Euro Crack is in the head It’s not enough it’s in the head You got to let it out You got to blast it out Crank this crank this crank Crank this crank this crank	Rapping (“ku”) starts upbeat. The vocals are doubled and pitch is lowered. 4/4 beat except for “kräkkää tää” and “kränkkää tää” parts (bars 5–8 and 13–16) which follow a 3/3/2 pattern, and synth accents on each syllable “hammer” the words. During first part of the refrain (bars 1–8), only synthesizer riff plays following the melody of rapping. No drums yet except for a quiet ride cymbal in the background reminiscent of a bell ringing at 00:06–00:07 and at 00:16–00:17. During the second part (bars 9–16), the bass joins in along with an added layer of synthesizers playing an octave	First image is of a concrete wall with black smoke rising from the ground, then a large dusty warehouse with graffitis on the walls, debri falling and the two rappers in the middle of the longshot. White logos of the production company are briefly displayed against a black background, blurring with flashing images from the warehouse. A wall with meters, and the Euro Crack logo next to the word KRÄKKÄ which then switches into KRÄNKKÄ, appear in the middle of the wall at 00:07–00:11. An electricity bolt divides the image in half vertically.

			higher than the previous riff. Simulated electricity crackle at “kräkkää tää” and “ulos päästää, se pitää ulos bläästää.” Julma Henri repeats “Euro” and “yo” on top of the vocals during the last eight bars. Bars 13–16 (“kränkkää tää...”) are accompanied by accelerating off- and on-beat snares and hi-hats. Accelerating programmed drums introduce the verse.	Then the duo is seen in the warehouse from various angles in rapid shots. Julma Henri is seen putting Euro Crack albums into a small see-through plastic bag and grinning, cutting into a scene of one of them putting electricity on, then we see a neon violet billboard with a text “WE SELL CRACK 24HRS” with a large arrow pointing to a booth where the duo is seen standing at 00:18. RPK’s hands are briefly seen using his midi controller at 00:22. The intro ends with the rappers waving their hands to the beat high in the air.
00:26–01:18 Verse A Julma Henri 32 bars	Bars 17–24 *Vannon dharman en draaman nimeen* *Mä oon täysin rauhallinen* *Mut karma on niin vaarallinen* *Sä et haluu et annan mennä* *Jotain paskaa jääny tänne* *Palautan sen lähettäjälle* *Kuminauha pommi Euro Crack snapback* Bars 25–32 *Bumerangi* *Elän eri maailmas ku sinä*	Bars 17–24 I swear on the name of dharma not drama I’m completely calm But karma is so dangerous You don’t want me to let go Some shit here left behind I’ll return it to the sender Rubber band bomb Euro Crack snapback Bars 25–32 Boomerang I live in a different world than you	Synthesizer riff, programmed drums, with occasionally accelerating hi-hat accents, 4/4 bass. Added reverb which makes the beat sound spacy and snares “booming.” The recurring synth riff is replaced with a synthesizer melody reminiscent of a xylophone in the third part (bars 33–40). A switch back to the original riff at fourth part (bars 41–48).	A cloud of dust introduces the scene. The duo is seen standing and moving in the warehouse (longshots and middle shots). A red-and-white pill with the Euro Crack logo and name is “thrown” towards the camera at “bumerangi.” At “Näät mun naaman noin,” Julma Henri rolls his ski mask and we see a glowing metallic skull instead of his face, with a red dot and

	Sä näät vaikka mitä mutta mä en nää mitään *Käsitteet energiat koossa täällä pitää* *Nosta aidat pois näät mun naaman noin (whazzzaap)* Bars 33–40 *Murha vanhenee henki ei* *Opettelin säälii näit vanhuksii ja vammasii* *Yrittämättä taskut täynn' edelleen päin punasii* *Joku antaa äänii vaikken ehdolla mä ole ees* Bars 41–48 *Joku kuuli kun mä mun temppelii lakasin* *Pelkkä se saundi sen mielen kai puhisti* *No kun kerran kuuntelit niin tee ny sitten duunisi* *Oot saanu hyvät passaa vasemmalle muillekin mullekin!*	You see a lot but I see nothing Concepts energies holding it together Lift the fences see my face (whassup) Bars 33–40 Murder expires spirit doesn't Taught myself to feel sorry for the elderly and handicapped Without trying pockets full going to the red light Someone voting for me even when I'm not even running Bars 41–48 Someone heard when I swept my temple The sound alone apparently cleansed the mind Since you listened do your job You've received that good stuff pass it on to the left for the rest for me as well!	Julma Henri's voice rises to become a kind of cry or shriek at the end of the verse ("mullekin").	the text "x-ray on" in the upper right corner. At "lakasin" Julma Henri makes a sweeping gesture, at "puhistin" he sweeps his left shoulder with his right hand. The camera occasionally shows the empty warehouse, and at 01:14 we see a black-and-white EGS graffiti on the wall. Occasionally the images are shown through a blurred, black-and-white surveillance camera style filter with time running in upper left corner. At the end of the verse, Henri is seen bagging a cd with white gloves on, and puts it on top of a pile of similar bagged cds.
01:19–01:44 Refrain B 16 bars	Bars 49–56 *Ku eurocrack on täällä* *ei riitä et oot tässä* *Sun pitää kässää* *Sun pitää olla läsnä* *Kräkkää tää kräkkää tää kräkkää*	Bars 49–56 When Euro Crack is here It's not enough that you are here You have to understand, You have to be present Crack this crack this crack Crack this crack this crack	First part of the refrain (bars 49–56) without drums with only the synth riff. "Kräkkää tää" and "kränkkää tää" parts follow a 3/3/2 pattern, with synth accents on each syllable accompanied by off- and on-beat hi-hats.	The duo is seen in various parts of the warehouse, waving their hands or jumping. At "kässää" RPK points his left hand index finger to his left temple. The duo fist bumps in front of a wall with a Euro Crack logo graffiti.

	Kräkkää tää kräkkää tää kräkkää Bars 57–64 *Ku eurocrack on päässä* *Ei riitä et se on päässä* *Se pitää ulos päästää* *Se pitää ulos bläästää* *Kränkkää tää kränkkää tää kränkkää* *Kränkkää tää kränkkää tää kränkkää*	 Bars 57–64 When Euro Crack is in the head It's not enough it's in the head You got to let it out You got to blast it out Crank this crank this crank Crank this crank this crank	Additional layered synth riff and drums on bars 57–60. RPK shouting "eyy" and "yep" before his verse.	Transition to verse with a light dust cloud and RPK throwing the scarf on his head in slightly slowed motion.
01:45–02:37 Verse A' RPK	Bars 65–72 *Ei tarvii miettii mitä tää duunari duunaa* *Minne suuntaan duunaa kuumaa* *Päästää sanoi suusta* *Sanojansa huutaa* *Räppiä rukkaa rytmejä luuppaa* *Rumpuja pumppaa stygiä tuunaa* Bars 73–80 *Mun tuotannolle löytyy suuri luotto* *Oon rehti jäbä en mikään tuurijuoppo* *Aina kun isken näppini kehiin se on suuri tuotto* *Ei tarvii yrittää hommat natsaa ilmankin* *Se on mun luonto* Bars 81–88	Bars 65–72 No need to wonder what this worker is working on Which way producing hotness Letting words out of their mouth Shouting their words Adjusting raps looping rhythms Pumping drums finetuning tracks Bars 73–80 For my production many give a lot of credit I'm an honest dude not some alcoholic on a relapse Every time I put my neck into it the profit is big No need to push it things work out anyway It's in my nature Bars 81–88	The beat arrangement in the first part (bars 65–72) is similar to third part of Julma Henri's verse, then second and third (bars 73–80 and 81–88) are similar to Julma Henri's first, second, and fourth part. An added layer of synthesizers at final fourth part (bars 89–96), which is the same one used in the refrains for "kräkkää tää" and "kränkkää tää."	Longshots and middle shots of the duo. RPK seen using the midi controller and displaying it to the camera at "*Räppiä rukkaa rytmejä luuppaa, rumpuja pumppaa stygiä tuunaa*" and "aina ku isken." At "suuri luotto" Julma Henri points his finger at RPK. RPK puts both his hands on his mouth at "pitää tukkia." RPK pointing to the sky at "suuntani on päästä tyhjään."

	Mun tekemisis on meininki *mielentila luomu* *Kun mä tiputan sen se on ku vuono* *Kun sucker jäbä avaa kuonon se on kuin vuoto* *Joka pitää tukkia äkkiä ei se toimi millään muotoo* Bars 89–96 *Se on vaan huonoo* *Ja tää vaan hyvää* *Mulle pyhää* *Se näkyy kun tästä tykkään yhä* *Suuntani on päästä tyhjään* *Supermassiivine n musta aukko mun päässä jyllää* *Ne jotka ei hiffaa voi jäädä syrjään*	In my work the mood is organic When I drop it it's like a fjord When sucker dudes open their mouths it's like a leak That needs to be clogged quickly it doesn't work no way Bars 89–96 It's just bad And this is just good For me sacred It shows as I like this still My direction is to reach emptiness Super massive black hole runs through my head Those who don't get it may get left behind		
02:38–03:03 Refrain B 16 bars	Bars 97–104 *Ku eurocrack on täällä* *Ei riitä et oot tässä* *Sun pitää kässää* *Sun pitää olla läsnä* *Kräkkää tää kräkkää tää kräkkää* *Kräkkää tää kräkkää tää kräkkää* Bars 105–112 *Ku eurocrack on päässä* *Ei riitä et se on päässä* *Se pitää ulos päästää* *Se pitää ulos bläästää*	Bars 97–104 When Euro Crack is here It's not enough that you are here You have to understand, You have to be present Crack this crack this crack Crack this crack this crack Bars 105–112 When Euro Crack is in the head It's not enough it's in the head You got to let it out You got to blast it out	Same as previous refrain. Partial overlap with lyrics between verse and refrain.	The duo moving in various parts of the warehouse. Both are seen bagging their cd into plastic bags and into a cardboard box. RPK plays the controller at 02:50–02:51, his fingers hitting it synchronized (diegetically) with the beat of the song.

	Kränkkää tää kränkkää tää kränkkää *Kränkkää tää kränkkää tää kränkkää*	Crank this crank this crank Crank this crank this crank		
Instrumental outro 03:04–03:17 8 bars	Bars 113–120	Bars 113–120	Synth riff, bass line, snare drums, ticking hi-hats.	Longshot of the rap duo in the warehouse, black smoke rising from the middle of the floor. Dust cloud covers the rappers as the song transitions to the coda.
03:18–04:05 Coda “Musta Valo”	*Musta aukko* *Musta aukko* *Musta valo* *Musta aukko* *Musta musta aukko* *Musta valo (x4)* *Musta aukko* *Musta valo (valo, valo, valo, valo…)* *Musta aukko* *Musta valo (valo, valo, valo, valo…)*	Black hole Black hole Black light Black hole Black black hole Black light (x4) Black hole Black light (light, light, light, light...) Black hole Black light (light, light, light, light...)	Drums, synth riff. Lowered pitch in vocals. Ending with a metallic clang reminiscent of rewinding, the vocals and music continue to echo until fade out.	Flashing pink and blue longshots and middle shots of the rappers in a dark warehouse, the lights seemingly going on and off. RPK now has a white towel over his head with the hood of his track suit over it. The white colors or the rappers’ clothes are glowing, as the video is seemingly shot in negative.

APPENDIX 2: Cue sheet “Vanhasielu”

Time	**Lyrics (original)**	**Lyrics (translation)**	**Music**	**Visuals**
00:00–00:56 Intro 32 bars	Bars 1–32	Bars 1–32	Layered synthesizers, sounds alternating between keyboards, woodwind instrument, and an electric guitar. Sound effects of cracking wood continuing until bass drum beat starts at 00:29. The same beat continues throughout the song.	Blurred image of Ameeba at a camp fire with a husky dog. Trees moving in the wind at 00:15. Images of fjells and reindeers. Husky running in slow motion (00:29–00:43). Clear blue husky eyes (at 00:43), then another husky laying inside a small lavvu hut, and another in front of a small dog house.
00:57–01:52 Verse A 32 bars	Bars 33–40 *Oon parrakas vanhasielu eläny aikaa kauan* *Ja lisää bonusvuosia kertyy aina kun nauran* *Tuntenu monenlaisii tunteja paljo kipua tuskaa* *Iloa rakkautta valoa mustaa* *Siks on mistä rustaa* Bars 41–48 *Monimuotoisuutta itsekoettuu elokuvaa* *Elämysmatkailuu, mikä toimii mulla sulle en sitä lupaa* *Toki voit myös aina koittaa seurata samaa hullun polkuu* *Mutta varotan etukäteen* *Tienviitat sieltä ontuu* Bars 49–56 *Vältä mun jalanjälkii*	Bars 33–40 I’m a bearded old soul I’ve lived this time for long And gain more bonus years every time I laugh Known many kinds of hours a lot of hurt pain Joy love light darkness That’s why I have what to write about Bars 41–48 Diversity self-lived movie Travel experiencing that works for me I can’t promise they will for you Bars 49–56 Avoid my	Layered swaying synthesizers. Bass drum beat is now reinforced with a snare hit on third. The vocals have an intimate feel, constructed with the help of reverb. An additional snare with an echo at 4-bar-intervals from 01:04 (bar 37) onwards; every other hit has a “wet” echo and every other a ping-pong echo. Double-time off-beat crash effect from 01:26 (bar 49) to the end of the verse. A tinkling synth riff reminiscent of a xylophone	Verse begins with a close up of the rapper’s frosty face. Close ups of dogs, the rapper and camp fire throughout the verse. A middle shot of the rapper in the wind with his hands up at 01:41, cutting into a longshot of the rapper in the wind with one dog at 01:43. Sled dogs attached to each other at 01:46. As the verse ends, the rapper leans towards and then away from the camera filming him from below, with snow covered trees and grey-white sky above.

	jos et o valmis harhaileen *Jokasel oma spessu reitti omalle puutarhalleen* *Ja jos oot hukassa zekkaa sun kompassi* *Kun neula näyttää pohjoseen sul on kotimaan tatsi* Bars 57–64 *Elämä on monesti enemmän hämmentäny ku tuonu selkoa* *Oon paljon tyhmempi kun nerona osaan kertoa* *Ja hidas etana ketä ei edelleenkään tunne kelloa* *Muinaisjäänne sieltä mis aurinko ohjas eloa*	footprints if you're not ready to wander Everyone has a special route for their own garden And if you're lost check your compass When the needle points towards the North you have that homeland touch Bars 57–64 Life has often been confusing rather than clarifying I'm much more stupid than my master mind can tell you And a slow snail who still doesn't know the time A relic from a time when sun guided life	at 01:36 and 01:51 introduces bars 57–64 and the refrain.	
01:53–02:21 Refrain B 16 bars	Bars 65–72 *Läpi elämän mietitään mitä meiltä puuttuu* *Eikä nähä mitä meil on sitä kai siis nukkuu* *Hidasta elämää paikallaan oot jo perillä* *Miten mikään vois merkitä jos et välitä hengittää* Bars 73–80 *Koko elämä odotetaan kaikkee mitä meiltä puuttuu* *Eikä nähä mitä meillä jo on tietoisuus nukkuu* *Hidasta elämää, paikallaan oot jo*	Bars 65–72 Throughout our lives we think about what we're missing And don't see what we already have I guess that means sleeping Slow down life stay still you're already there How can anything matter if you don't care about breathing Bars 73–80 Throughout our lives we wait for everything we're missing And don't see what we already have consciousness is	Steady galloping drum rhythm, double-time off-beat crash effect continues in the background. Layered swaying synthesizers. Bass drum beat which is reinforced with a snare hit on third. Echoed vocals, reverb. The additional snare with an echo at 4-bar-intervals continues.	Extreme close ups of the rapper. Rapper caressing a dog at a camp fire. Close ups of different dogs. Middle shots of one dog on the snow-covered roof of a doghouse and of sled dogs attached to each other. Longshot of bluish fjell scenery (02:15–02:17).

	perillä *Miten mikään vois merkitä jos et välitä hengittää*	sleeping Slow down life stay still you're already there How can anything matter if you don't care about breathing		
02:22–02:50 Instrumental 16 bars	Bars 81–96	Bars 81–96	Drums cease. "Hengittää" echoing until 02:46 when a dog barks and howls, drone-like synthesizer in the background. A snare hit with a ping-pong echo in the beginning of bar 85 and bar 93. A tinkling synth riff reminiscent of a xylophone at 02:48 (the last bars 94 – 96) introduces the second verse together with the dog's barks.	Close ups of dogs. Middle shot from the front of the sled where one dog attempts to jump forward, being pulled back by the ropes. Middle and longshots of trees against a blue-orange sky, and brownish forest.
02:51–04:00 Verse A' 40 bars	Bars 97–104 *Välillä täytyy pysähtyy hengittää syvää sisään* *Miten ilman perusjuttui mikään vois merkitä mitään* *Vaikka mul on hyvä sydän sekään ei ikuisesti kanna* *Siks nuorena annan niin paljon ettei hävetä olla vanha* Bars 105–112 *Etenemisestä on tapana jäädä jälki* *Sama järki vähän kun liikuttaa kehoo siit tulee lämmin* *Jokaselle jotakin sun keidas on mun*	Bars 97–104 Sometimes you have to stop to breathe in deeply How can anything matter without the basics Although I have a kind heart it won't carry me forever That's why I give so much when I'm young so I won't be ashamed to be old Bars 105–112 Going forward tends to leave a trace When that same reason moves your body a bit it makes you warm	A synthesizer sound reminiscent of a horn starts the verse. Swaying synthesizers, same bass drum beat as throughout the song. Dogs barking at 02:57–03:02 (bars 100–103). Double-time off-beat crash effect in the background from 03:05 (bar 105) onwards. Repetition of the tinkling synth riff reminiscent of a xylophone at	Longshots of the sun lit sky above the snow covered fjells. Close shots of dogs while they are heard barking. First close up of the rapper at "hävetä olla vanha." Dog sled running forward at "etenemisestä on tapana jäädä jälki," then more close shots of the dogs barking and jumping. Longshots of sunset and an open lake surrounded by

	camping *Suhteellisuusteoriaa* *sun ruuhka on mun sänki* Bars 113–120 *Kokemus opettaa* *takaiskut ei oo kuolettavii* *Mutta puhun aina* *vaan toki omasta puolestani* *Itkeny maassa luullen etten taivasta enää näkis* *Puskenu läpi helvetin liekkien muistona* *monet räpit* Bars 121–128 *Kokemuksii aikajanalla takana eessä ja välis* *Sille lasi puhdasta vettä ja parit lämpimät händcläpit* *Yks rukous paremmasta jokaseen ilmansuuntaan* *Me ollaan kaikki yhtä kun sen jokanen ilmaan huutaa* Bars 129–136 *Tietonen paljosta tosin en viisas vielä* *En tiedä tulevasta mutta tiedän sitten kun oon siellä* *Tiedän et tiedän kaiken mitä mun nyt tarviikin tietää* *Tää vanha sielu jaksaa koska sietää et joskus hiertää*	Something for everyone your oasis is my camping It's relativity theory your traffic jam is my stubble Bars 113–120 Experience teaches you setbacks won't kill you Of course I can only speak for myself I've cried laying down thinking I'd never see the sky again Pushed through hell fires many raps as memento Bars 121–128 Experiences on a timeline behind in front and between Here's a glass of fresh water and a few hand claps to that One prayer for the better for each point of the compass We are all one when everyone shouts it out loud Bars 129–136 Aware of much though not wise yet Don't know about the future but I'll know once I'm there I know I know all I need to know This old soul will endure because it can handle the occasional chafe	eight-bar-intervals from 03:16 (bar 111) onwards.	snow, middle shots of reindeers. Close shot of the "oracle" rapper, a dark figure with a hood standing in front of the sunset at 03:23. Dog sled running at 03:27, 03:39 and 03:55. Rapper twirling in the wind with one of the dogs (03:42–03:48). Close and middle shots of the rapper at the end of verse.
04:01–04:58 Refrain B x2	Bars 137–144 (& 153–160)	Bars 137–144 (& 153–160)	First repetition of the refrain	Long, middle, and close shots

32 bars	*Läpi elämän mietitään* *mitä meiltä puuttuu* *Eikä nähä mitä meil on* *sitä kai siis nukkuu* *Hidasta elämää* *paikallaan oot jo* *perillä* *Miten mikään vois* *merkitä jos et välitä* *hengittää* Bars 145–152 (&161–168) *Koko elämä odotetaan* *kaikkee mitä meiltä* *puuttuu* *Eikä nähä mitä meillä* *jo on tietoisuus* *nukkuu* *Hidasta elämää* *paikallaan oot jo* *perillä* *Miten mikään vois* *merkitä jos et välitä* *hengittää*	Throughout our lives we think about what we're missing And don't see what we already have I guess that means sleeping Slow down life stay still you're already there How can anything matter if you don't care about breathing Bars 145–152 (& 161–168) Throughout our lives we wait for everything we're missing And don't see what we already have consciousness is sleeping Slow down life stay still you're already there How can anything matter if you don't care about breathing	(bars 137–152) is identitical to the previous refrain. Doubled vocals from second repetition (bars 153–168) onwards, increasing the intensity until galloping drum beat ceases at 04:45 (bars 161–168).	of dog sled running, both in slow motion and normal speed. Rapper-oracle in front of the sunset (04:15–04:24). Dog sled running, rapper at the camp fire. Longshots of the fjells. Rapper petting the dog and twirling the in wind with the dog. Middle shot of Ameeba looking directly at the camera with his hands up at "*paikallaan*" (at 04:55).
04:59–06:09 Outro 40 bars	Bars 169–208	Bars 169–208	Swaying, layered synthesizers, programmed strings beginning with a tremolo growing into crescendo. Dogs howling (at 05:10, 05:23). Drum beat ceases at 05:35, only layered synthesizers play until the end. One layer of the programmed strings plays	Ameeba kissing the dog's snout in slow motion. Close and middle shots of dogs howling, and the rapper in the wind. New born puppies indoors in a barn and slightly older puppies outdoors (05:35–05:49). Longshot of the sunset and fjells, blurred image of the rapper at the camp fire petting the dog. The video ends

			staccato, remisniscent of a drum beat. A crackling sound reminiscent of vinyl player in the background throughout the outro.	with a longshot of the rapper driving into the sunset with the dog sled, then a close up of him turning away from the camera towards the sunset sky, his black silhouette becoming a formless black thing.

APPENDIX 3: Cue sheet “Luoti”

Time	**Lyrics (original)**	**Lyrics (translation)**	**Music**	**Visuals**
00:00–00:26 Intro 16 bars	Bars 1–16	Bars 1–16	Video game samples and two different gun cocking samples which function as snares along with indistinct male(?) shouts. At the end of the intro, the voice seems to say “vakaa” (steady) three times with lowering intonation. Layered and heavily echoed drone-like synthesizer. First eight bars (00:00–00:12, bars 1–8) end with a bang reminiscent of a door slammed shut, adding a layer or synthesizers. The slam is then heard with 2-bar intervals.	An animation (00:00–00:07) of horizontally symmetric rainbow color soundwaves against a dark background, with the name of the production company above, and the artists and the song name below. A middle shot of Khid against a black background first looking to the side, then straight at the camera which he points with his index and middle finger like aiming with a gun. His names written in white flashes over the image. White gunshot residue seems to be floating around. RPK is seen introduced with the letters delineating the image. Both rappers then stand next to each at 00:22, then we see only Khid.
00:27–01:21 Verse A 32 bars	Bars 17–24 *Ei auta maalata piruja seinille mun puolesta* *Mä kävin jo toisel puolella ja heitin tägit Tuonelaan* *Kävin jo lähin jo joka helvetin lähiö* *Heitä kädet ilmaan jos tunnet sielussas häviön*	Bars 17–24 No need to tempt fate on my behalf Already went to the other side and left tags in the underworld Already went already left every fucking suburb Throw your hands in the air if you feel loss in your soul	A bang reminiscent of a gun shot starts the verse. A prominent distorted sub bass. Complex drum patterns with various snare and hi-hat hits. Marching band style snare drum samples from bar 21 onwards (00:35).	The verse begins with a close shot of Khid’s mouth and jaw rapping the lyrics. White and black gunshot residue appears to be floating around throughout the video. Khid bites into an apple while a white line covers his eyes and partially

	Bars 25–32 *Alust asti muukalainen* *Avaruuden musta aine* *Luolamaalaukset tuoksuu ilmas kun tiputan mun lainei* *Ohjelmoitu sotahuuto, polarisoitu* *Kädet ilmaan jos sielunmaisemas on kolaroitu* Bars 33–40 *Ei oo yleisavaimii lukot selän takana* *Mihin mä tarviin freestailii ku on mieli vapaana* *Klik-klak ja suussa maistuu luodin rei'iltä* *Kun riikinkukot lentää ja sanat leviää* Bars 41–48 *Ansioituneet kiillottelee rautaista kuorta* *Mut kun alkaa satamaan nii puolet juoksee suojaan* *Savumerkit ilmaan ja sormenpäillä tähtää* *Pohjantähden alla räppärit merihädässä*	Bars 25–32 Alien since day one Dark matter in space Cave paintings smelling in the air when I drop my lines Programmed war cry polarized Hands in the air if your soulscape has been crashed Bars 33–40 No master key locks behind the back What do I need freestyle for when my mind is free Click-clack and mouth tastes like bullet holes When peafowls fly and words spread Bars 41–48 The commendable ones polish their iron shells But when it starts to rain half run for cover Smoke signals in the air and point with finger tips Under North Star rappers in distress	Samples of indistinct male shouts. Synthesizers, video game samples from bar 31 (00:56) onwards. Gun cocking samples at "klik-klak" (01:02). Additional syntherizer layers from bar 33 onwards.	his left ear. He is seen beginning to spit it out at 01:00 and finally spitting at 01:06. The images of the artists (Khid and RPK) switch between middle shots in front of a grey background featuring the lightning-looking cover image of the album *Ei*, with smoke in front of it, and a blank white background with close ups. Alternately we see animations of bullets. Strobe effect when Khid utters "klik-klak" while both rappers seemingly jump towards the camera. Middle shot of Khid against a black background looking at the camera and not lip-syncing at "ansioituneet kiillottelee rautaista" (01:09–01:11), then a flash of a white background with a black version of the lightning-style cover of *Ei* album.
01:22–01:49 Refrain B x2 16 bars	Bars 49–56 (& 57–64) *Heitä sun kädet ilmaan (ilmaan)* *Tähtäimet kohti rintaa (rintaa)* *Lataa (lataa)* *Käsi vakaa (vakaa)* *Päästä avaruutes vapaaks (vapaaks)*	Bars 49–56 (& 57–64) Throw your hands in the air (air) Gun sights towards the chest (chest) Load (load) Hand steady (steady) Set your space free (free)	Video game samples and two different gun cocking samples which function as snares. A prominent distorted sub bass. Synthesizers and video game samples throughout.	Strobe effect at first "kädet ilmaan," while Khid points his hands towards the sky both times when the line is rapped. RPK is seen from the side, Khid´s back towards Khid's back. Images switching between slow motion middle

				shots of one or the other of the rappers in front a black background and a blank white background with slow motion or normal speed close ups. A quick flash of an image of a skull at 01:39 and at 01:46, first placed after and image of Khid and then after RPK. RPK airplaying a keyboard at 01:49.
01:50–02:45 Verse A 32 bars	Bars 65–72 *Viidennen kerroksen parveke kakskyt gee* *Ja viimenen henkäys jonka jälkeen viimenen tanssiaskele* *Poistun rikospaikalta* *Sormenjäljet haihdutan* *Ja taas yhellä näkyy sydänkäyräs* *Otava* Bars 73–80 *Ei kauniimpaa EKG tauluna* *Ja hymyssä alkaa näkyy häivähdys aitoa* *Omistettu kaikille jotka ei ymmärrä täst sanakaa* *En pohdi mitä mun sylki suuhun tuo vaan tajuntaa* Bars 81–88 *Kovat jäbät jauhaa* *Ei tarvi Cupidoo* *Ei tarvi rakkautta eikä tarvi apuu ahdinkoo* *Annas olla kun nää pahat pojat*	Bars 65–72 Fifth floor balcony Twenty gees And final breath after which final dance step I leave the crime scene Dispel finger prints And once again someone has Ursa Major in their cardiogram Bars 73–80 Nothing prettier EKG as canvas And smile begins to show a hue of realness Dedicated to all those who don't understand a word of this I don't ponder over what my mouth says but consciousness Bars 81–88 Tough guys talk No need for Cupid No need for love or help for distress We'll see when these bad boys are taken outside	A bang reminiscent of a gun shot starts the verse. A prominent distorted sub bass. Complex drum patterns with various snare and hi-hat hits, occasional marching band style snare drum samples. Samples of indistinct male shouts. Synthesizers and video game samples throughout.	A mirror image of Khid's mouth moving while his head is against a canvas (01:50–01:54, 02:04–02:07, and 02:43–02:46), looking like he has pantyhose over his head. Images of the artists switching between middle shots or close ups in front of a grey background featuring the lightning-looking cover image of the album *Ei*, with smoke in front of it, and a blank white background with close ups. This time also mirror and prism distortions occur in the images. Animations of bullets and mandala-like prisms of the rapper(s) with a black background.

	viedään taivasalle *Ne menettää miehuutensa omasta pienuudestaan* Bars 89–96 *Kenelle kiillotat sun piilotettuu kotias* *Jos elämä pelkkää harhaluotia kunnes joku ottaa osumaa* *Mä tähtään rintalastaan solisluiden alle* *Kädet ylös jos on todellisuuden tarve*	They lose their manhood due to their own insignificance Bars 89–96 Who are you polishing your hidden home for If life is just stray bullets until someone gets hit I aim at the breastbone underneath the collarbones Hands up if you're in need of reality		
02:46–03:13 Refrain B x2 16 bars	Bars 97–104 (& 105–112) *Heitä sun kädet ilmaan (ilmaan)* *Tähtäimet kohti rintaa (rintaa)* *Lataa (lataa)* *Käsi vakaa (vakaa)* *Päästä avaruutes vapaaks (vapaaks)*	Bars 97–104 (& 105–112) Throw your hands in the air (air) Gun sights towards the chest (chest) Load (load) Hand steady (steady) Set your space free (free)	A bang reminiscent of a gun shot introduces the refrain. Video game samples and two different gun cocking samples which function as snares. A prominent distorted sub bass. Synthesizers with a slightly different pattern compared to the first refrain and video game samples throughout.	Middle shots and close ups of the rappers in front of a blank white background. Animations of bullets and mandala-like prisms of the rapper(s) with a black background. A flash of a skull at 03:02. Bullet shells falling down (03:08–03:12) until the gun shot sound.
03:14–04:00 * Outro 24 bars	Bars 105–128 *(Vapaaks, vapaaks, vapaaks…)*	Bars 105–128 (Free, free, free…)	A bang reminiscent of a gun shot introduces the outro. Synth riff imitating video game samples throughout until fading out at 03:53. Vocals fade out at 03:23. A ping-pong style reverberated ticking starting quietly, then becoming more prominent and finishing the song.	Middle shots and close ups of the rappers moving one after the other in slow motion in front of a black background. The last frames are mirror image of Khid turning his back to the camera and then exiting from the picture. White logo of the Balansia production company at the end.

* The total length of the video is four minutes three seconds; however, the music ends 3 seconds before the video and the end is left blank (black).

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